

THE DYNAMIC DEATH OF GOD IN HANS URS VON BALTHASAR
~CHRIST AS THE TEST CASE FOR IMMUTABILITY AND IMPASSIBILITY~

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Abstract

From the age of Hellenism, humanity inherited a profound concern for whether the nature of Ultimate Reality is fundamentally static or active; being or becoming; immanent or transcendent. This is the problem of the “One and the Many” restated in the language of movement: is our ultimate experience nothing more than vacillating, contingent, aimless motion? Or is there something firm and unmoving that undergirds all the changes and movements of life? The problem was received into the Christian tradition as the problems of *Immutability* (whether God can change or possess successive movement) and *Impassibility* (whether God can experience passions), with both typically considered in three ways. First, as an unexplained and paradoxical balance. Second, as wholly transcendent: a God fully immutable and impassible, without experiences or feeling, in perfectly blissful independence. Third, as fully immanent: a God who experiences and feels so much alike to us that he becomes locked into a mutual dependency upon the creaturely world, requiring it in some way to be fully himself. The history of Christian doctrine on these twin subjects could easily be described as a dialectical pendulum between each of the two latter extremes. One of the most famous 20th century Catholic theologians, Hans Urs von Balthasar, received this traditional set of tensions and sought in his work to walk a “knife’s edge” between the two historical extremes, without simply answering in paradox. In order to formulate his answer, Balthasar utilizes his unique conception of the Trinity’s interior life. By the divine nature of love exegeted in the transcendentals, all the contingency, suffering, and change of the creation can be found, in an archetypal form, within the divine life itself—avoiding both a God who is so close as to have no meaning, and too far as to be irrelevant.

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Vita

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CHAPTER I: BALTHASAR'S LIFE AND THE LIFE OF THE PROBLEM

I recall with stark clarity a moment in my youth when my most Reformed of pastors spoke a phrase that forever impacted my image of the divine, and thus, reality:

“God is the only uninfluenced being.”

At the time, I had little knowledge of all the portraits of God painted throughout the Christian tradition, and into its library of scriptures, which spanned a spectrum from uninfluenceable to influenceable, from changeable to unchangeable, from suffering to stoic. I did not know then that I was observing in action a long tradition in Western theology that attempted to walk a thin, precarious line. This line cut between a divine being that, on the one hand, seemed to define itself by the life, death, and resurrection of a first century carpenter-turned-Rabbi, yet on the other hand, seemed also to exist at a distance from physical reality, an undisturbed anchor for the contingent realm, existing in unchanging perfection. I did not know it then, though I do now: I had been thrown unknowingly into the deep waters of the immutability and impassibility of God, drowning in the enormous ramifications for how we perceive and interpret the world in these divine categories of ultimacy. The question of immutability and impassibility has had a long and deep history in Western thought, from philosophy to theology: is the dynamism of the world fundamentally troublesome? Shall we ourselves strive to be ever-stoic and unchanging? Is change, on a cosmic or personal scale, fundamentally imperfect? Is perfection necessarily a phenomenon of stasis? Is suffering a mere mortal experience of evil, or is suffering in some way divine; a piece of what it means *to be*?

Were the Greeks right to believe that man's ultimate calling is to *apatheia*? Are we to involve ourselves in a world of change, or attempt to escape it into another world of perfection? All questions of ultimacy hang relative to this idea of whether the divine is static or dynamic regarding change and succession (*immutability*) and whether it may suffer or feel, in a way at least similar to human experience (*impassibility*). If we are to clarify our reality, we must on some level engage with the fundamental question of whether the divine is immutable and impassible—whether it is, indeed, influenced or only the sole influencer?

This question has been a live discussion for thousands of years, of course, held among Christians, philosophers, Muslims, Hindus, Jews and agnostics, all alike. It shall now be taken up here in the work of the great 20th century theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. Our central purpose, our thesis, shall be this: how does Balthasar understand God relative to immutability and impassibility? Said another way, does Balthasar hold a coherent understanding of the experience of God, that is at once (a) true to his own method, (b) true to his Christocentric divine “test case” of Jesus Christ, and also (c) mindful of the pitfalls of either historical extreme, whether a divinity of total fluidity or total stasis? Thus, one final permutation of the thesis could be this: How Balthasar explains suffering and change as part of divine being. But, of course, none of these permutations make sense without a context, so we shall proceed to answer the question and investigate the claim in the following way. First, the present chapter shall examine (i) *who* Hans Urs von Balthasar was—his life, his work, and his reception, followed by (ii) a brief summary of the heart of his method, and his Christocentricity (1.1). Then, the present chapter shall conclude with a summary of the problem of immutability and

impassability in the Christian tradition within which Balthasar worked. Where in Christian doctrine do these issues become a live tension? To answer this, we shall examine several test cases that fill out the problem of immutability and impassibility in the Christian tradition and so, in Balthasar: the problem of Creation (1.2), of Human Incarnation (1.3), of Suffering and Death (1.4), of Death Itself (1.5), of Resurrection (1.6), of Relationship (1.7), and of the Eschatological (1.8). With method and problem established, Chapter Two shall turn to examine the history of answers throughout the pre-Christian and Christian traditions—from the pre-Socratics to Balthasar’s contemporaries (2.1-2.5), so that we might establish the two extremes which Balthasar shall navigate between. Chapter Three, then, shall directly examine Balthasar’s response, founded on his Trinitarian theology (3.1) which then will inform an answer to each of the prior problems (3.2-3.8). There, we may ascertain, in summary, if Balthasar has navigated well between the two historical extremes, synthesizing their positives and avoiding their negatives (c), while staying true to the heart of his own self-declared method (a) and his Christocentricity (b) (3.9). This, then, is the thesis of our work: to show that Balthasar’s explanation for divine suffering and change, as exemplified in the test case of the life and death of Jesus Christ, navigates sufficiently between the two historical poles and, in the process, remains coherent to his own method. This is to examine that great mystery of John 1 and Philippians 2, whose authors could dare to apply such a word as *γίνομαι* to the divine; “God becoming—.”

i. The Life and Death of Hans Urs von Balthasar

Hans Urs von Balthasar was born into an old family of patricians and nobles from Lucerne, Switzerland, on August 12th, 1905. He was the first of three children of Oskar

Balthasar, an architect, and Gabrielle Pietzsker, an office bearer of the Swiss League of Catholic Women, in the city most “synonymous with Catholicism in Switzerland.”¹ His sister Renee would later become a Superior General for a Franciscan order of nuns—and with Balthasar later to become a Jesuit, his family could truly be called “Catholic of Catholics.”² A love of music dominated his childhood, with his first book (in 1925) being an attempt at musical synthesis. Educated in his youth by Benedictine monks in Switzerland and Jesuits in Austria, he completed his examinations a year ahead of schedule, and took up the study of German literature and philosophy at the University of Zurich in 1923, at the age of 18. This education was furthered at the Universities of Berlin and Vienna, amidst the bitter feelings of the post-war years.³ There, he discovered influential figures in the form of Kierkegaard and Plotinus, with whom he faced up against the limits of existence and knowledge, turning him toward the opinion that playwrights, musicians, and poets were as much theological sources—and perhaps better ones—than Systematicians and Magisterium.⁴ After completing his doctorate on the whole sweep of the German idealistic (and all-too-apocalyptic) consciousness through history, Balthasar had a particular mystical experience in 1929, which he never fully explained, under a particular tree in the Black Forest near Basel. “As if struck by lightning” he was called by God, as he put it, without another choice even desirable. This led him toward the priesthood: two years of training as a Jesuit, two years more of philosophy near Munich, and four years of theology in Lyons. This decision brought

¹ Aidan Nichols, *The Word Has Been Abroad* (Washington: The Catholic University American Press, 1998), ix.

² Ibid, referencing Phil 3:5.

³ Aidan Nichols, “Balthasar and his Christology,” *New Blackfriars* 66, no. 781/782 (Jul/Aug 1985): 317, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43247829> (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁴ Nichols, *Word Abroad*, xi.

from trouble on all sides:⁵ his philosophic and idealist compatriots saw it as apostasy to their cause, while Catholic education—and especially the Jesuits—were still full-swing amidst a resurgence of Neo-Scholasticism, started by Pope Leo XIII in 1879—an utterly “complete” systemization of religion and philosophy, within which certain, predetermined questions remained open, but much of its scope was highly limited; “more a reaction to modern culture than a return to St. Thomas.”⁶ Balthasar found much of this study dry and arduous, a “grim struggle with...what men had made of the glory of Revelation,” and against which he wished to lash out in “unbounded indignation.”⁷ In order to occupy himself, he turned to reading outside his curriculums: French literature and the early Fathers of the church—a direction he followed from formative influences like Henri de Lubac and Jean Daniélou. For Balthasar, these patristic streams ran far deeper than Neo-Scholasticism tended to reveal, with a nature and grace that were not quite so distinct, where reason wasn’t so tightly pre-determined and more conservative wings saw hidden motivations to find unity with Protestants and subvert current orthodoxy.⁸ Balthasar’s work turned to Origen, Maximus the Confessor, and Christ in the role of *analogia entis*, not as “messy metaphysic,” but as a powerful and life-giving way of participatory being, learned from perhaps the man he respected most, Erich Przywara.⁹

Ordained in 1936, Balthasar worked for a time at a German Jesuit periodical in Munich, *Stimmen der Zeit*, but by 1940, the winds of history were blowing and the Nazi

⁵ Stephen M. Garrett, “The Dazzling Darkness of God’s Triune Love: Introducing Evangelicals to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,” *Themelios* 35, no 3 (Nov 2010), <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-dazzling-darkness-of-gods-triune-love-introducing-evangelicals-to-the-t> (accessed March 8, 2019).

⁶ Karen Kilby, *Balthasar: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 17.

⁷ Kilby, 18; David Moss & Edward Oates, “Introduction” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar* ed. by David Moss & Edward Oates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

⁸ Kilby, 22; Nichols, “Christology,” 318.

⁹ Nichols, *Word Abroad*, xiv.

regime was in power. Late in his life, Balthasar could still speak of hearing SS boots marching outside and watching Hitler on parade. Balthasar saw firsthand the disturbing fulfillment of the “apocalyptic soul” of Germany that he had noted in his doctoral work.¹⁰ The Third Reich’s encroachments upon the Catholic church led Balthasar to two offers outside of Germany: A Professorate in Rome, at the Pontifical Gregorian University, or a University chaplainship in Basel. Whether out of love for his homeland, a desire for the practical, or a dislike of working among even deeper entrenched Neo-Scholasticism in Rome, Balthasar made the unexpected choice of chaplaincy, and moved to Basel. This was a bizarre change for one so well-educated and intellectually capable, but one which left Balthasar content and happy.¹¹ In Basel, he spent the tumultuous years of World War II hearing the bombs and watching the lights from across the Rhine. From there, he criticized what he saw as a stagnant Catholicism in deep need of a new infusion of life; a return to its roots (*ressourcement*), in prediction of what would come with Vatican II. Even as he stood out in his Catholic context, Balthasar stood out as a rare Jesuit amidst the high intellects of the Swiss. Nonetheless, he befriended numerous influential figures there, including Karl Barth, whose theology was marked by similar Christocentric, revelatory, and modernist concerns. Balthasar would end up writing the first Catholic analysis and response to Barth’s enormous work, which Barth would declare the greatest extrapolation of his work—even only a year after Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical directly condemning Barth’s rejection of natural theology. Both men carried a genuine sympathy and admiration for each other, in a spirit of ecumenical engagement uncommon

¹⁰ Nichols, “Christology,” 318.

¹¹ Kilby, 23; Moss & Oates, 4.

between Catholic and Protestant of the time.¹²

At Basel, Balthasar also met Dr. Adrienne von Speyr in 1940, a twice-married and chronically ill Protestant, to whom he became a spiritual director. The mystical visions and experiences of von Speyr, including stigmata and suffering, were highly influential on Balthasar, and he would always view his theological work as an inseparable accompaniment to her own experiential works, superlative in his mind and unseen since St. Teresa of Avila, which he would record and publish.¹³ Together, in 1945, though another uncommon move for the time, Balthasar and von Speyr founded a secular religious society for both men and women, “The Community of Saint John.” This was even more drastic than it first appeared, for doing such a thing was irreconcilable with his Jesuit position. Even though Balthasar understood it as working out the spirit of St. Ignatius into a broader, unrestricted sphere, The Order did not see it the same way, and he was forced to renounce his membership in 1950. He would carry the stigma, like von Speyr, for the rest of his life. Because of this choice, no Bishop nor Dioceses would support him, leaving him banned from teaching in any Catholic capacity. Thus, he made his way as a writer, prodigiously published through St. John’s, on the Fathers, Mary, the modern state of the church, proto-ecumenism, Holy Saturday and the death of God, hopeful-universalism, the dichotomy of masculine and feminine, and seemingly a thousand topics beside. Additionally, he worked as a lecturer for the universities across Europe, finding himself rather scorned for it by the elite and conservative Catholic establishment, with a file kept on him in the Vatican for his ecumenical outreach, in

¹² Kilby, 24-25.

¹³ Moss & Oates, 5.

particular.¹⁴ In 1956, the Bishop of Chur was willing to incardinate him as a secular priest, a rather minor token. As the titanic event of Vatican II was shaping up, Balthasar remained uninvited, finding himself alone among the great theological minds of his generation, even though he had been a precocious voice for such an event. When Balthasar returned to Basel after a brief time away, he lived with Von Speyr and her second husband and continued to publish their joint works until her death in 1967—much to his great mourning.

Meanwhile, as the decisions and reforms of Vatican II came into full force, opinions on Balthasar began to shift. Between 1961 and 1985, Balthasar published his magnum opus, his own eccentric Systematics in trilogy of fifteen volumes, organized around the transcendentals. The beautiful in seven volumes, the good (or dramatic) in five volumes, and the true in three volumes; each in their own way getting at the entire theological enterprise. In 1969, amidst a new church culture that valued his reforming, but not-too-liberal nature, he was finally appointed by Pope Paul VI to the International Theological Commission, with the recognition that Balthasar had been a man who saw beyond his own time. In 1984, he received the first Paul VI International Prize for contributions to theology, and in 1988, Balthasar obediently accepted Pope John Paul II naming him a Cardinal, rarely done for those outside the bishopric.¹⁵ Yet, on June 26th of that year, two days before the ceremony that would elevate him to the consistory, Balthasar died of a heart attack in his home at Basel. A telegram from the Pope was read at his funeral for “a great son of the Church and outstanding man of Theology,” partnered with a homily praising Balthasar as a vindicated man who saw ahead of his time, given

¹⁴ Kilby, 27-29; Moss & Oates, 5.

¹⁵ Nichols, *Word Abroad*, xx.

by one Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger—later to become Pope Benedict XVI.¹⁶ In his resurrection to the mainstream, Balthasar’s thought spanned beyond the Catholic-Protestant distinction, or even the liberal-conservative binaries: his unbounded thought influenced beyond any artificial distinctions and pushed back against all sides, even some movements of Vatican II. Balthasar was a man always rowing against the current, seen in hindsight as “the most cultivated man of his age.”¹⁷

ii. The Heart and Method of Hans Urs von Balthasar

It could be well-said that Balthasar was the most unsystematic of all supposedly systematic theologians. His work was never subject to an editor’s scrutiny and was spread over nearly fifty volumes—even his *magnum opus* trilogy is so uniquely organized that it defies easy categorization. The set functions almost cyclically or narratively, coming around again and again, with differing lenses, to examine similar topics in “glorious disorder.”¹⁸ His work fits neatly with neither liberal nor conservative wings, neither with traditionalists nor modern theologians. Indeed, he never even produced a central methodological statement—for what Balthasar does could hardly even be called “argument.” Instead, he simply lays out in pure exposition what he takes to be a self-exonerating and compelling vision of what it means to be human, what it means to be divine, and how the two may coincide.¹⁹ In some way, Balthasar understood his work as the culminating presentation of all that had come before, from the Fathers to Aquinas to German idealism, in some sort of mysterious revelation that brings it all into coherent

¹⁶ Kilby, 32-33.

¹⁷ Nichols, “Christology,” 317.

¹⁸ Gerard O’Hanlon, *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 176.

¹⁹ Kilby, 7-10.

light;²⁰ a balancing act between all the cacophony of improper extremes to have preceded him.²¹ Because of this, an overview of methodology cannot easily be extracted. Instead, let us present what is, by Balthasar's admission, *the* central thread, which might be unwoven into the three major strands of his trilogy and then braided back into an *analogia entis*: love.

Balthasar's trilogy is undeniably about the three classic transcendentals of being, but, at nearly its close, he reveals that "love is the hidden ground underlying the transcendentals and their circumincession of relation."²² Acting as unity-in-separation by "reciprocal interpenetration and mutual implication," the beauty, truth, and goodness combined in all of being exists as the love which enlivens everything in all-pervasive imminence.²³ Indeed, as with the Trinity, Balthasar believes that none can be spoken of without the other or without their totality in love, for they are not truly properties in themselves. Instead, the transcendentals are the definition or making-be of properties.²⁴ Every-thing, by its very existence, participates in an essence that transcends its individuality; a mysterious and constant "self-surpassing" participation into the transcendentals which can only be measured in divine terms.²⁵ This is not a Neo-Platonic Gnosticism, in which all specific energies of things are to be stripped away in order to get at a few "abstract, non-sensory concepts," rather, it is in the very color, sound, taste, and odor that the transcendentals unfold and "come to itself," to which we subjects must

²⁰ Aidan Nichols, *Say it Pentecost* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 2.

²¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mysterium Paschale*, trans. Aidan Nichols (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), viii. Hereafter, *MP*.

²² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theologic I: Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 9. Hereafter, *TL I*.

²³ *Ibid*, 7-8.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 15.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 58.

make ourselves humbly available, in an “attitude of service.”²⁶ There is, in this “self-surpassing” and “reciprocal interpretation” of individual existences in the transcendentals, a sort of “super-abundance,” in which the essence of being is perceived as a well of “infinite surplus of the possible.” The transcendentals are revealed in the perfection of finitude; as a veiled excess of freedom,²⁷ which, in humans, becomes the power to freely tell truth or to freely lie, as one possesses the self-consciousness to measure between things and their expressions.²⁸ This freedom, this interpenetrating super-abundance that overflows, glues together, and yet permits separation, is none other than love—that which “keeps being from ever becoming a sheer fact.”²⁹

Love, then, is the gratuity of being which overflows in and amongst all being, giving itself to beings and being returned in an eternal dance of cosmic exchange among unique essences. Together, they are all bound in their universal participation in love, always surpassing and coming into itself as it flows through the activity of being. Subjective being is as the lover who, knowing the possibility he sees truly embodied in the beloved, both observes it and draws it from the other, raising it from the depths. Yet, the “ideal was only concealed in the Beloved” and, so, the lover knows its coming-to-be in the “object” is ever only as an action of that beloved, who genuinely realizes and bestows their potentiality as an existing reality, drawn up and defined by the self-giving of love. This then reveals from stem to stern that the whole exchange, the whole matter of being, is and was impelled by self-emptying, self-giving, self-defining, gratuity of love.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid, 66-67.

²⁷ Ibid, 88-89.

²⁸ Ibid, 93.

²⁹ Ibid, 111-112.

³⁰ Ibid, 115.

All being, then, is found comprehended and utterly marked out, in the mind of the divine.³¹ This is most perfectly captured for Balthasar in the image of a mother and child, who, in her first smile upon the newborn, draws out of them, with her selfless love, the first experience of an “I” in the image of the “Thou,” the “primal foundation of being,” which is then sustained in that same, self-bestowing, love.³² Unweaving this beating heart of love brings out the united aspects: the transcendentals, Balthasar’s central touchstones for the trilogy. The first, beauty, starts off his theological aesthetics in *The Glory of the Lord*, as thus:

*“before the beautiful—no, not really before but within the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only ‘finds’ the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it.”*³³

Beauty “dances as uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation.”³⁴ Beauty functions as the captivation of being, the unsurpassable attraction of being to others, which bear its image, as the revelation of the excellence of existence, shot through by the essence of love. Beauty is the abyss of love opening up, it is the understanding of the interplay of infinite and finite, which invites other being to hand itself over to the all-encompassing force that is its warm embrace.³⁵ Beauty is thus a transformative and transportative phenomena, by

³¹ Ibid, 119.

³² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone is Credible*, trans. DC Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 75-75. Hereafter, LA. He writes: “As a child awakens to love it also awakens to knowledge, the initially empty sense impressions gather meaningfully around the core of the vow. In this face, the Primal Foundation of Being smiles at us as a mother and as a father. Insofar as we are as creatures, the seed of love lies dormant within us as the image of God. But just as no child can be awoken to love without being loved, so too no human heart can come to an understanding of God without the free gift of his grace in the image of his Son.”

³³ From Oliver Davies, “The Theological Aesthetics” in *The Cambridge Companion*, 270.

³⁴ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord I: Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 18. Hereafter, *GL I*.

³⁵ Ibid, 159.

which the individual “forms” of beauty (that which is tasted, touched, and heard) rapturously invite, indeed compel, the observer into itself, by its splendor and to enjoy its splendor—composed of the transcendental love that fills all things, pouring down from the divine. Beauty, then, as appreciation, wooing, and transformation of *being*, also, in the same act, is the shining-forth, participation, and interpenetration of being—which shall shortly take on concrete form.

Second, then, comes the Good in the *Theodrama*. Therein, the transcendental is examined narratively in the actions of divine and mortal, carried particularly over the Passion week. The divine, for Balthasar, is the director, producer, and actor upon the world. There, the Good is made clear as the active form of love;³⁶ that which *should be* in response to the splendorous revelation of being.³⁷ The Good is the ongoing action, revelation, or story, of those particular acts which “self-surpass” into that ever-increasing gratuity of being; indeed, in a sense, the good is when freedom is rightly engaged in response to the expression of the beautiful.³⁸ Thus, in this action, the dramatic takes effect—and so the need for a Theodrama. What will the response to beauty be? Shall it be an exchange of equal self-donation? Or an inward-turned black hole that allows no light of beauty to escape back out in natural reflection?³⁹ The Good is the freedom of the beautiful and the freedom of the beautified; it is the freedom of both subject and object in active interplay—the existential aspect of life, lived in momentum amongst a cosmos shot-through with love.⁴⁰ If beauty is the mother’s inviting smile, inspiring a “Thou,” the

³⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodrama I: Prolegomena*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 646. Hereafter TD I.

³⁷ Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 2.

³⁸ Balthasar, *Theodrama II: Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 23-33. Hereafter TD II.

³⁹ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 5.

⁴⁰ TD I, 16; TD II, 33-36.

Good is the engaged and ongoing active response—both the new “I” and the “Thou” which birthed it. This goodness is brought, then, into sharpest relief and highest dramatic tension when beauty is concretized in a solid, analogical form, one we shall reach presently.

Lastly, though, comes the True and, thus, the need for a *Theologic*; the truth defined and revealed in terms of a Trinitarian event of revelation and incarnation.⁴¹ The True is “being’s ability to appear as it is”, the unveiling to a particular subject in a reliable and faithful way, both adjudicatory and intuitive—a master and judge of what is, which carries one beyond the known and into the unknown.⁴² The True is the disclosure of the self-aware subject, the movement of the ground of being, self-possessed and free, into appearance by movement, as both open and receptive to revealing itself to be seen in beauty and engaged in goodness.⁴³ It is both expression and capability to be known, the offering up of self-knowledge, a being-for-other, the self-donation of love.⁴⁴ The True, too, possesses a self-surpassing measure, as it reveals in being that splendor which is “greater than the sum of its parts”: love. This allows a new appreciation for being every morning, though the truth be known by heart.⁴⁵ Just as with beauty and goodness, and indeed with love, the divine is the infinite measure of truth which “is no longer measurable, but that measures all the rest.”⁴⁶ Being becomes less “I think, therefore I am” and more “I am thought, therefore I am”—the True is the inspiring act of self-revelation that is between the child’s “Thou” and the “I” of its mother. The True is to be found in

⁴¹ Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 2.

⁴² Ibid, 12-13.

⁴³ *TL I*, 37, 217-220. The Good is also Trinity: the communicator, the communicated, and the communication itself.

⁴⁴ *TL I*, 144; Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 18-19, 27-29.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 38.

⁴⁶ *TL I*, 45.

that very act of divine knowing, so concretized in total truth as the one being to whom we shall now turn.

We see, then, as much of a Balthasarian method as we shall find—that being is:

*“[beauty], the pure irradiation of the true and the good, for their own sake...the simultaneity of self-being, self-outpouring characteristics of communicative...an illusive, indescribable joy...which carries its own ground in itself,”*⁴⁷

These three participate in each other as free and mutually self-donating love, occurring in a creaturely and finite way, as the child’s “Thou” participates by being created by the mother’s “I.” The Beautiful, Good, and True are inseparably transcendental, together unified in and by the love which irradiates all of being: the beautiful its splendid wooing, the good its rightful engagement, and the true its willing self-dispossession. Thus, as these make up the contours of being, for Balthasar, “man must make himself into God’s mirror...to attain to that transcendent irradiance... if it is indeed God’s image and likeness.”⁴⁸ Yet, this seems unachievable—to reach some measure of full participation with these unbounded and infinite transcendentals of being. Balthasar rightly says it: “if God appears in the signs of his creation, you can only do so within the tension...that marks the appearance of the ground in the image.” Love is ultimately divine phenomena, and thus being is, as well—so how is it achieved in us? What if, as one might wonder, there was one whose photograph appeared with “features so eloquent, the expression so vivid, that you would almost believe you have a living man before you?” What if there was an artist’s attempt “so powerful that you believe the

⁴⁷ *TL I*, 224.

⁴⁸ *GL I*, 22.

reality has been set immediately before you, rather than the image”? What if the image has been

“so filled to the brim with the whole significance of the ground, so much so that the vessel appears almost to overflow...that the what the vessel contains seems greater [the self-surpassing ‘ever-more’] than the vessel itself.”⁴⁹

Thus comes the transcendental of love, and all its aspects, into the concrete form of a man whom Balthasar considers the singular and unique, ultimate and ever-surpassing, True, Good, and Beautiful *analogia entis* reaching down in self-exegesis to man: Jesus Christ.

1.1: The Christology of Hans Urs von Balthasar

Just as in his beloved contemporary Barth, the person of Jesus Christ is, perhaps, Balthasar’s unsurpassable methodology—a veritable Christological revolution in Catholicism.⁵⁰ Having seen an overview of Balthasar’s understanding of love as the cosmic and divine transcendental that imbues all of being, having divided it then into the three aspects of beauty, goodness, and love, the whole thing can now be reconstituted as love-in-concrete as the person Jesus Christ, who alone is the prime, and in a sense ‘only’ analogy by which we may speak of this *being*, and thus, beyond it, the divine.⁵¹ It is only by Jesus that the contrasting shadows of the finite and the light of the infinite are surpassed, without destroying either, for he is in himself, “the way [the good], the truth

⁴⁹ *TL I*, 235-236.

⁵⁰ Nichols, “Christology,” 317.

⁵¹ The challenge facing modern scholarship, in Balthasar’s opinion, is to re-appropriate a participatory imagination of analogy in which infinite perfections outstrip their finite counterparts in a degree of infinite dissimilarity (i.e., the analogy of attribution), in a manner that is not arbitrarily chosen and merely an anthropocentric projection of finite relationality onto God (i.e., an analogy of proportionality informed by divine revelation)...so that the measure between the two is navigated by the Son in the event of the incarnation.” David Robert Henderson, *Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Suffering of God* (Master’s Thesis, Trinity Western University, 2006, Theological Research Exchange Network, #048-0412), 15-16.

[the true], and the life [the beautiful].”⁵² The incarnation takes “created being at a new depth, as a language and a means of expression for the divine,” over the whole “expressional apparatus of Human,” to prove that the “meaning of Being is love.”⁵³ Jesus Christ is God manifested as the only way he could truly encounter man: as ‘neighbor,’ who is “the nearest to me, yet always [also] the one who stands furthest from me.”⁵⁴ For Jesus Christ to be the Word of God is to be his freely-chosen self-disclosure, the breathing manifestation of divine intelligibility, the self-exegetical declaration of divine being.⁵⁵ It is ever and only the Son who fully interprets the utterly-distinct Father in the Holy Spirit (and so *being* itself) as divine dove. Indeed, each transcendent coincides in Christ who, in his “majesty of absolute love...approaches man...” (the good), “in revelation...” (the true), and “invites and elevates him to an inconceivable intimacy” (the beautiful).⁵⁶ In Christ the centerpiece,⁵⁷ the fundamental depth between absolute and relative, divine and mortal, finite and infinite, is overcome by the depths of the divine “inexpressible loftiness,” only possible because the depths are of love—which inherently

⁵² John 14:6.

⁵³ *GL I*, 29; *LA*, 62.

⁵⁴ As one “can never know or experience a person self in his uniqueness.” Ibid, 46.

⁵⁵ Balthasar parts from Barth in supporting full natural revelation, “for you can’t know a stranger you’ve never engaged in any way with.” But complete revelation lies in Christ, who must be freely self-revealed (*LA*, 48-50). Christ is the “perfection of the form of the world” in which God’s was already present (*GL I*, 431-432) as gratuitous gift, preshadowing the ultimate gift to come. He is the “crowning recapitulation of everything in heaven and on Earth” (*LA*, 48-50.)

⁵⁶ *LA*, 56. “All distinctions...subside into one another in a transcending fullness in the one in whom the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily...in whom accordingly the previous distinction between the archetype of divine glory and its reflection on the human image...is bypassed and dissolve, so that the one of whom we must not speak becomes in an unheard-of founder of all periods and indeed the effulgence of the glory in the imprint of the substance of God himself.” Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, ed. Brian McNeil and John Riches, trans. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Saward, and Rowan Williams (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 13. Hereafter, *GL V*.

⁵⁷ *GL I*, 463.

overcomes all such boundaries.⁵⁸ Thus, Jesus Christ can be the true *analogia entis* of the being, *the one true way of knowing being*, and thus, too, the divine's ultimate being.

*"Being itself here unveils its final countenance, which for us receives the name of trinitarian love; only with this final mystery does light fall at last on that other mystery: why there is Being at all and why it enters our horizon as light and truth and goodness and beauty."*⁵⁹

While Balthasar, as any good Catholic theologian, will affirm that it is "beyond us to say exactly what any word means when applied to God,"⁶⁰ he will refuse any purely negative theology. Indeed, Christ, the only true revelation, is himself positive theology. What Balthasar will insist upon is that, in whatever language we apply to God, we must remember that God's unbounded "ever-more" nature will infinitely surpass whatever is attributed to him. That is, God will always be *more* than what we can perceive in the *analogia entis*, but *never less*. The Trinity is opened up and made accessible by the Christ,⁶¹ who was a "decisive turn in seeing God,"⁶² both positive revelator and also the guide to the divine incomprehensibility.⁶³

This self-proclaimed "unsurpassably High Christology" naturally leads to problems, as it did in the early church controversies of *physei* and *prosopa*. These categories are not unknown to Balthasar's Christology, but he will deal far more in kenotic states than the realm of natures.⁶⁴ Balthasar affirms with fervor the Chalcedonian definition: God must face humanity as both "neighbor" who may confront him, and

⁵⁸ *LA*, 61.

⁵⁹ *GL I*, 539,

⁶⁰ *LA*, 109.

⁶¹ Balthasar does not deny usefulness of apophysis to strip away "intermundane experiences," but such must always relate to positive revelation in Christ: a position Balthasar calls "a knife's edge." *Ibid*, 107-108.

⁶² *MP*, 18.

⁶³ Balthasar, *Theologic II: Truth of God*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 61. Hereafter *TLII*.

⁶⁴ Nichols, "Christology," 321.

“master” before whom it must bow, “able to touch and eat him.”⁶⁵ Thus, Christ is two natures—“truly God and truly man...unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably,” not unilaterally “from above”, as he exists as the “here below.”⁶⁶ Just as the senses are the “exteriorization of the soul...Christ is the exterior realization of God.”⁶⁷ Thus, rather than conflict between the natures of divine and human, Balthasar sees a complementary state in Christ. By incarnation, the divine doesn’t enter into “merely a foreign land, but into a country whose language he knows.” Creaturely logic is not foreign to the logic of God, as he continues one of his most striking metaphors: “it could be likened to a dialect of the standard language spoken in pure form by God.” There is not a dichotomy of natures in Christ, so much as Jesus makes “the divine archetypes shine forth in the worldly images and similitudes,” not as distortion, but as “pure truth.”⁶⁸ Thus, *ana-logic* is the primary way of understanding the divine: the way in which the mortal hints at the divine, and the divine eternally supersedes it.⁶⁹ The natures of creature and creator in Christ are *unmixed*, and necessarily different; their difference is infinite, *unconfused*, but the divine can, and does, *indivisibly* and entirely, encapsulate the mortal in Christ. The mortal is not outside of God, it is *unchangeably* filled by him.⁷⁰ Rather than a zero-sum Christology, in which every space carved out for humanity must be taken from divinity, or vice versa, Balthasar sees a divine nature that is so gratuitous that there

⁶⁵ *GL I*, 406.

⁶⁶ *TL II*, 72-73. Specifically, he considers the Chalcedonian definition, even Hellenized, to be justified as a “strategic measure” against Gnostics and Arians out of reverence for the divine mystery. Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 79.s

⁶⁷ *GL I*, 407.

⁶⁸ This shall be examined further in Chapter 3, as the heart of this work lies entirely within these words. *TL II*, 84.

⁶⁹ Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 72.

⁷⁰ Balthasar will differ from Athanasius or Aquinas, who might treat the humanity of Christ as a “conjoined instrument”; a creaturely space upon which to de-anthropomorphize the divine. For Balthasar, though, “the glory of God is nowhere, not for single instant, separated from the lamb” (Nichols, *The Word*, 37).

never need be such an exchange. The form of God must be seen in the “*concrete analogy of being*” as real and embodied. The beauty must transfix in the form, the good must be concretely cemented in drama, the true must be revealed clearly in person, all shining through the form.⁷¹ Precisely in being so human does Christ so perfectly reveal the divine,⁷² for the Word, “muted by the density of flesh, resounds all the louder.”⁷³ Thus, the hypostatic union, for Balthasar, is a “super-form,” as “the becoming visible and experienceable of the God who is himself triune.”⁷⁴ This forms an unbroken continuity from divine *Logos* to Incarnate Christ, more God-as-man than God-and-Man.⁷⁵ Rather than systematized in static essences or natures, Balthasar’s Christology is dramatized as dynamic and existential event.⁷⁶

Lastly, Balthasar insists on one final key to his Christology: Jesus, the Son, is to be identified in his existence with a universal mandate of God; that is, as the Son, he is the Divine Mission.⁷⁷ Thus, it is not just his Passion that is revelatory as the *analogia entis*, rather, Christ’s entire mode of life, from birth to death, is the self-announcement of being, the clear self-expression of the divine.⁷⁸ Everything of Christ is an “aesthetic unity” held together by the “style of unconditional love.”⁷⁹ The imminent will and being of the free Trinity is present in the economic ordering of Christ. He is, in his most foundational identity, the Word that is Sent, the will revealed, revelation itself, the

⁷¹ Inasmuch as Balthasar insists on Jesus’ superlative divinity, he also insists that we cannot get at it apart from his superlative humanity: all theology must be done from “within the drama.” There is no other way (Kilby, 53-54, 70).

⁷² Mark McIntosh, *Christology from Within* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 40.

⁷³ *GL I*, 475.

⁷⁴ Nichols, *Word Abroad*, 35.

⁷⁵ *GL I*, 432; Quash, *Cambridge Companion*, 143-158.

⁷⁶ *TD I*, 118; *GL I*, 471-473.

⁷⁷ *GL I*, 472.

⁷⁸ *LA*, 84-85.

⁷⁹ Nichols, “Christology,” 320.

dramatic mission-intention of the divine into the created order.⁸⁰ Christ is a “senseless act of love,” received and acted upon by him in faith, as he allowed that dramatic action of beauty, truth, and goodness to fill his being to the very brim and endorse the will of the Father fully upon his life, enacted by the Spirit.⁸¹ As *analogia entis*, Jesus Christ is *that very intent* of divine overflow, the self-consciously eternal event of the divine Trinity.⁸² He does not arrive upon stage by accidental generation as we do, but by an eternal free choice that is his, given from the Father.⁸³ He is, in definitive continuity, in role, in mission, in identity, the very making-known of the Father.⁸⁴ Thus human life and death, rather than divine antinomy, is the self-expression of God.⁸⁵

Thus, Balthasar holds an immensely high Christology, while still insisting on the necessity of Christ’s true manhood. Jesus Christ is the *analogia entis* for being itself, and so also for the divine. This is Balthasar’s “Christology-from-Below,” in which the divinity is understood backwards through the *analogia entis* of Christ’s historical being.⁸⁶ But if true knowledge of the divine is found pre-eminently in the historical life of a man in the first century, precisely *through* his very human existence of pains and joys, birth

⁸⁰ *LA*, 88; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 18-19.

⁸¹ *LA*, 101-102. Christ was a “total exposition performed.” *TL II*, 17, 23-24.

⁸² Nichols, “Christology,” 320. Balthasar, *Theodrama III: Dramatis Personae: Persons in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 110-111. Hereafter, *TD III*. (Matt 16:21, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22, 44, 17:25, John 2:4, 7:6-8, 8:20).

⁸³ Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 75.

⁸⁴ John O'Donnell “Von Balthasar: The Form of his Theology,” in *Balthasar: His Life and Work*, ed. David Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 207-210. Thus even Jesus “has a sort of faith...this is an elemental truth that cannot be surmounted, unless a child is awakened to I-Consciousness through the instrumentality of a Thou, it cannot become a human child at all...Jesus cannot escape this anthropological principle...For if it is true that Jesus’ sense of mission coincides with his self-consciousness...so Jesus undergoes a historical learning process with regard to his fellow men in their tradition but essentially this is parallel by an inward learning whereby he is initiated more and more deeply into the meaning and scope of his mission.” (*TD III*, 166-174).

⁸⁵ Nichols, *Word Abroad*, 37.

⁸⁶ Too often in theology, for Balthasar, Jesus has been an accidental complication to God’s metaphysics. *TD III*, 150.

and death, hunger and thirst and satisfactions,⁸⁷ then we return to be faced with the problems of immutability and impassibility. If the perfect *analogia entis* can suffer and die, if it can remain dead, if it can be returned to life, if it can have experiences, be incarnated, and *become*—if the *analogia entis* can *weep*—⁸⁸ what account can Balthasar give of the divine that allows it to remain, as he has put it, the transcendental measure of all being—rather than simply being lost amidst it? Let us first achieve a firm grasp on the nature of these troublesome problems, by examining eight “test cases” through which the problem of immutability and impassibility might be illuminated.

1.2: The Problem of Creation

The first trouble enters the problem at its heart: upon creation, the divine inaugurates something that is not itself. Out of nothing, the divine creates times and space, with which he must, by necessity, have some sort of relationship—indeed, one that Balthasar perceives as Christological, for all things were created “in, and through, and for Him.”⁸⁹ “Right from the outside,” in Christ, Balthasar writes, “God had involved himself with the creation of the world,”⁹⁰ indeed, Christ is the “divine presupposition” for creation, ensuring that its being is according to love: free to love, though finite, with all the possibilities of suffering that come with refusing to love.⁹¹ But how shall the infinite engage with the finite? There is an endless gap of distinction between the two, and if God were to reach across, it seems unimaginable that it would be in any way different than

⁸⁷ “The individual historical existence of Christ can be so universalized as to become the immediate Norm of every individual existence.” Col 1:15. *GL I*, 29. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 79-80. Hereafter, *TH*.

⁸⁸ John 11:35.

⁸⁹ John 1:3, Col 1:13.

⁹⁰ *TD II*, 9.

⁹¹ O’Hanlon, 51.

what we would call “experience” or “change,” that is, engaging in a succession of events that define creatureliness.⁹² Yet, Balthasar insists that the divine cannot be mutable in the “mythological sense,” a superhuman Zeus who experiences like creatures do. No, the difference between creature and creator is far more qualitative than that. God must remain transcendental to determine being. But how then can the divine write with “hieroglyphs of human destiny”?⁹³ And so, the problem cannot be magicked away: a God who seems to experience intensely sorrow, joy, anger, regret, change, even surprise.⁹⁴ How, then, does the divine remain sovereignly free, not captured or mythologized by the created freedoms with which he engages?⁹⁵ How can he remain sovereignly divine, possessing omnipotence and omniscience, when true freedom has been granted to uncountable other bodies?⁹⁶ How can creature and creator coexist without one being irreversibly dissolved into the other—whether on the side of pantheism or “theopanism”?⁹⁷ Either of these paths will undermine the heart of Balthasar’s work. If God is dissolved into the world, identifying himself with its process, then there are no transcendentals to stand above being and bestow it with the meaningfulness of love. If the world is dissolved into God, as an extension of his will or power, then love becomes meaningless without reciprocal movement—there is no true “other” to love, no one to freely enjoy beauty, nor a real drama to participate in, nor truth to be revealed.⁹⁸ Truly,

⁹² Gen 1-3, Once time is inaugurated, the view is that of a divinity engaged in those succeeding events

⁹³ *TD II*, 57, 95, 191.

⁹⁴ Ps 78:40, Isa 63:10, Jer 8:18-9:3, Hos 11:1-11/Deut 28:63, 1 King 10:9, Psa 149:4, 1 Chr 29:17, Jer 9:24, Hos 6:6, Mic 7:18/Ex 32:9-10, Psa 78:31-41, 88:16, Isa 30:27-28, Ezek 25:17, Gen 6:6-7, Ex 32:12-14/1 Sam 15:11, Ps 106:45, Jer 18:8, 26:3, Joel 2:13-14, Amos 7:3, Jonah 3:9-10, 4:2/Gen 22:12, Ex 16:4, 2 Chr 32:31, Isa 5:3-7, Jer 3:19-20.

⁹⁵ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 63.

⁹⁶ *TD II*, 195-196; Balthasar, *Epilogue*, trans. Edward Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 108.

⁹⁷ *TD II*, 118-119.

⁹⁸ *GL I*, 611. For Balthasar, compelling coercion destroys love and so with it, being (Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 69-70).

“spirit must have the possibility of giving itself to the other without the possibility of the other capturing it.”⁹⁹ Said another way, the heart of the question at hand is this: Does God need the creation?¹⁰⁰ Is the absolute written upon the relative?¹⁰¹

The problem is then deepened when we turn to suffering, for it is one undeniable reality that this world is bathed in “unspeakable butchery”; human history as the “grinding, pulverizing millhouse of blood and tears.”¹⁰² Being seems at odds with itself, living as strife with one another, and even if we escape all these ills, death finally comes for us, all the same. “Nothing can match up to the reality of suffering that overtakes us all.”¹⁰³ Yet, if being and divinity are truly defined by love, then should they not, too, suffer? Does the divine not drink the same cup as humanity? Or does he sit in blissful stoicism, unable or unwilling to experience the pain of the world he has wrought? And if the divine does suffer with the world, does this not risk being passably tied to it? Indeed, is this a God susceptible to relational pain and risk, provoked and grieved—sorry, weary, bewildered, exasperated, lamenting, abandoned, and crying out?¹⁰⁴ A deity so bound to creation that he will “wax wroth” over its infidelity—a mourning, love-sick, drowning, God?¹⁰⁵ Can the source of transcendental being fully remain his Beautiful, Good, and True self, if he is poisoned by the corpse of creation? Thus, the twin questions crouch: is infinite freedom and power, divinity, given up into the creation of the Other in the world?

⁹⁹ *TL I*, 82, 98.

¹⁰⁰ *TD II*, 120, 128.

¹⁰¹ Balthasar, *Theodrama IV: The Action*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 84. Hereafter, *TD IV*.

¹⁰² Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 103.

¹⁰³ *TD II*, 120.

¹⁰⁴ Balthasar, *Theodrama V: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 214-216.

¹⁰⁵ Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 38-39.

And is the divine above all suffering and pain, or is the horror of creation a lived-and-felt reality for God?

1.3: The Problem of Incarnation

These questions of creation and creator would be difficult enough were they to stop here and sit alone. But the test-case of Christianity declares not an absent Creator, but one who arrived in flesh; who actually, truly, fully, *became* something.¹⁰⁶ The question of creation is thus overwhelmed, superseded, and absorbed into the even more bizarre tale of divine-become-zygote. Jesus God, both fully man and fully God—"God is Christ-like and in him is no unchristlikeness at all."¹⁰⁷ But the problems herein are boundless: the eternal among the full generations of humans? The spiritual enfleshed? The infinite born particular? The complete growing in mind and body? The absolute falling tired? The creator with hunger and thirst?¹⁰⁸ The Transcendental subject to experiences of marvel, ignorance, compassion, sorrow, anger, frustration, disturbance, and fear?¹⁰⁹ How is one to rectify this paradox? How can mortal *being* be both ruled and defined, yet participated in and made subject of, the same person?¹¹⁰ Where does the identity of God lie, in immutability or mutability? Passable or *apatheia*? This is the ancient philosophical problem of "The One and the Many" recurring in Christianized language. How do the contingent experiences of life find rootedness in something solid?

¹⁰⁶ Kilby, 44-45.

¹⁰⁷ Everything was said in Christ. Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, trans. A. V. Littledale & Alexander Dru (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 24.

¹⁰⁸ Matt 1:1-17/John 1:14/Luke 2:7/Luke 2:40,52/Matt 4:11, Luke 23:26, John 4:6/Matt 4:2, John 19:28.

¹⁰⁹ Matt 8:10, 9:36, 16:10, 23:27, 26:39, Mark 3:5, 6:1-6, 13:32, Luke 2:52, 4:24, John 11:33-35, 23:27, 13:21.

¹¹⁰ O'Hanlon, 21.

Troublingly, the problem will be soon stretched beyond itself in the next test-case, even to its breaking point.

1.4: The Problem of Suffering Death

It is one thing to wonder how the divine creator intersects with his creation, and if any freedom or *apatheia* must necessarily be given up in the engagement. It is another to declare that the divine has, truly, *become* and *experiences* all the incoherent change that defines human life. Yet, even then, it is quite another thing entirely, to say that the divine has been *murdered*. This, though, is the central claim of Christianity's earliest texts and of Balthasar's theology itself—for as the story goes, “death the disorder,” “death, the interpreter of life,” “death, the infinite weariness.” “death the unmaking of kings,” “death, the price of our entire existence” came for the deity, as well.¹¹¹ It is not incidental or accidental to the life of the Incarnate, either—Jesus' repeated attention to the “appointed time” and “coming hour” is with him from the very start of his self-awareness; it is to the end of the death that he sees himself as ever headed, actively consenting as a sacrificial lamb to slaughter.¹¹² This God-as-Man must die—the measure of being and summation of transcendence must suffer “that which is common to all man” as his “definitive orientation.”¹¹³ Can it be that “misery, destruction and loss are brought into the very conception of love itself”?¹¹⁴ Does the fount of life accept willingly its extinguishment? How could all of existence survive in light of the death of its sustainer—

¹¹¹ *TD I*, 371-400.

¹¹² *TD IV*, 234, 338. (John 2:4, 4:21-23, 5:25, 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 13:1, 17:1).

¹¹³ *MP*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Kilby, 122.

which is even called “glorious”?¹¹⁵ Then comes the final cry: “Why have you forsaken me?” and the bond between being itself and the *analogia entis* appears broken, and the entire universal order with it. How can divinity’s *experience* be both so broken, as death devours its greatest meal, indeed, the entire cosmos, mapped out in one man? How could it be that deity, the ultimate, the infinite, the free, the true, the good, and the beautiful, could perish, disjointed from itself? Balthasar insists that we sit and stew on this most mendacious of all deaths.¹¹⁶ Indeed, it is the unparalleled test case for one looking to understand the experience of God, the immutable and impassable.

1.5: The Problem of Death

This turns, then, to one of Balthasar’s most particular and unique contributions: a theology of Holy Saturday, or of ‘the Hiatus’. Most of historical orthodoxy differs from Balthasar’s thought here,¹¹⁷ as he claims that Jesus is utterly inactive, utterly passive, utterly embraced in the non-existence of death; abandoned by God in an absolute severing of the bond between these two who hold the same essence.¹¹⁸ This, of course, is the final experiential stop of the freight train of immutable and impassible questions that took off at the creation: can God actually experience separation in the ongoing death of the Second Person?¹¹⁹ Balthasar stresses here Christ’s utter “passivity and solidarity”

¹¹⁵ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord III: Lay Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, John Saward, Martin Simon, Rowan Williams (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1986), 137. Hereafter, *GL III*.

¹¹⁶ Henderson, 31.

¹¹⁷ That is, Christ wasn’t passively dead, but was proclaiming victory and rescuing saints from some type of hell.

¹¹⁸ *LA*, 96-98.

¹¹⁹ The first was whether God-the-free creates something separate from himself that may truly engage in freedom with him (Creation)? The second, whether God-the-absolute actually gives up of himself to become human and experience all that comes with mortality and contingency (incarnation)? The third, whether God-the-transcendent actually experiences, in himself, suffering and slain by them (crucifixion)?

with the dead, completely estranged from himself and alienated from God the Father.¹²⁰

The Hiatus, for Balthasar, is the most absolute extent possible for the divine, entering into even the self-damnation of man and a true experience of godlessness; the final step to experience full humanity, in all heights *and* depths.¹²¹ In doing so, all the previous tensions are intensified to their ultimate degree. The drama is heightened to this final, unimaginable point.¹²² Can divinity experience all suffering and everlasting wrath in Gehenna, made alien to himself?¹²³ More than simply dying, God-as-Man, in Jesus Christ the *analogia entis*, is well and truly *abandoned*.¹²⁴

1.6: The Problem of Life

One may be tempted to think that the experiences of God relevant to immutability and impassibility would close with his death. But while this point is a decisive turn, it is certainly not *away* from the question of God's experiences and relation to the contingent world. There are three problems yet left to be examined. The first is resurrection—for returning to life is no less a sequential experience than suffering unto death, and it is no less a concern of Balthasar. There is a moment of radical and decisive change, when death is swallowed up by victory and a “divine suddenness” begins the perpetuity of eternal life, as Jesus soars to divine glory.¹²⁵ The Resurrection is a “soteriological liberation” in which the truly dead person of Jesus is transfigured back into infinite

¹²⁰ Nichols, “Christology,” 322.

¹²¹ *GL II*, 68-70.

¹²² Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 169.

¹²³ Job 26:6, 28:22, Ps 55:24, 88:12, 140:2, 142:8, Prov 15:11, Lam 3:7, Jer 21:12, Rev 9:2. *MP*, 75.

¹²⁴ *MP*, 90-94.

¹²⁵ Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord VII: The New Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 172-175. Hereafter, *GL VII*.

freedom, “sustained, accompanied and totally permeated” by God.¹²⁶ This is the resurrection that will be experienced by all mortal flesh, for these remain, in the *analogia entis*, precisely and entirely temporal experiences of succession and change alike to all being. Acted upon by an active Father and Holy Spirit, he has moved from life to death, and from death to life—the whole range has been experienced. As says Balthasar, “A God who arises from the dead is just as startling as a God who dies.”¹²⁷ How can this be?

1.7: The Problem of Relationship

For Balthasar, the experiences of Christ do not end with ascension, for he continues to exist among the corporal whole of his people, his body, which he experiences *as a body*. This test case, then, continues the ongoing problem of God’s experience of time: how does Jesus Christ, the divine *analogia entis*, continue to change and experience in a corporate life? There is some way in which God’s experience in Christ has been received by all those called “the church,” making his ongoing experience of that body as the ongoing re-experience(ing) of God.¹²⁸ This then becomes the same question of creation and divine engagement made into particularized microcosm: how does God relate to and engage with a temporally bound people? Can the prayers of his people, his body, change or impact him or his decisions? Can the divine remain in the drama through his people, and continue to experience the sufferings and pains and changes of his people as his own?¹²⁹ Thus, ecclesiology must be called “a live category,”

¹²⁶ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 173.

¹²⁷ MP, 194; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 177-182.

¹²⁸ MP, 137.

¹²⁹ MP, 135-136. (John 15:1-4, 17:23, Rom 6:3-5, 8:1-2, 1 Cor 1:30, Col 2:12, Gal 2:20, Eph 2:8, 2 Peter 1:4).

born of the dying blood and water sacramentally spilt from the cross—¹³⁰ a problem of the same mold as those previous: how does the supposedly immutable and impassable divine include lived experience, even of creatureliness, in itself?¹³¹

1.8: The Problem of the Future

“The reality between cross and Parousia are, in reality, open brackets and God has acted once for all,”—so Balthasar’s summary of the future may be made, clearly in line with what has already occurred.¹³² Though known pre-eminently in the test-case of the Cross, even the future must be included in what it means for God to change, experience, and suffer.¹³³ This eschatological point demands that we ask questions of fundamental meaning and purpose; not only “what of man if he lost the divine,” but “what would God lose if God lost man”?¹³⁴ Would God be immutably unperturbed if humanity was lost forever? Would his blessedness remain equal whether one human or one million humans are found participants in the divine flow? If the entire creation were to crash and burn, or ascend into the full treasures of life and love, would God know no change in experience or affect? Does his transcendent nature supersede the creaturely consequents to an extent that latter’s end could never impact the former?¹³⁵

Summary: The Problems and their Payoff

¹³⁰ O'Donnell, “Form of His Theology,” 207.

¹³¹ O'Hanlon, 47.

¹³² Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 202-203.

¹³³ *MP*, 201-202.

¹³⁴ O'Hanlon, 65.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 66.

Thus, to the end of answering these problems, we have examined the fascinating life of Hans Urs von Balthasar, a man both in and out of his time. We have looked over his essential methodology founded in the transcendentals of beauty, goodness, and truth, summarized in love, and explored his Christology, which concretizes everything transcendental in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the *analogia entis*, the window into the divine and, thus, into being itself. It is to these two factors that Balthasar's answer to the problem of divine immutability and impassibility, whatever it may be, must remain true. We have also, in eight points, enumerated the Christological "test-cases" that force this twin-problem to be a live issue in the Christian tradition. The fact that the supposedly-divine Christ had experiences in succession, of change, and of deep suffering—creation, incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection, corporate engagement, and future fulfillment—creates a multitude of problems, which may be boiled down to this: how can the perfectly infinite, blessed, and absolute be revealed perfectly in the finite, suffering, and changeable? How can the transcendent bedrock of all reality be also made immanent object of that same reality?¹³⁶ How can the *analogia entis* of perfect being—good, beauty, and truth—exist in imperfection without contradicting the necessity of the divine being, who transcends all of the Many in order to be the anchoring One? The importance of these questions has been recognized throughout the history of philosophy and theology and it is to that context we now turn: the history of answers that came before, through the extremes of which Balthasar will need to navigate his own answer. This way, we might comprehend past successes and pitfalls, so that we might recognize if Balthasar can synthesize something better.

¹³⁶ "Does suffering man stands higher than the God who cannot suffer?" *MP*, 63-64.

Chapter II: THE HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

2.1: Pre-Christian Philosophy (600-0)

Perhaps it could be said that the primary purpose of ancient Hellenistic philosophy was to ferret out that thing “which persisted through all change.”¹³⁷ How can our experience of both contingency and constancy, in ourselves and in the external world, be made coherent? Of all the Pre-Socratics, two men ascend high enough to become the source of two resultant streams of thought: Heraclitus and Parmenides. These two generally reflect the earliest disagreements and may serve as archetypal of two typologies that will flow from those mountain heights of immutability and impassibility. Heraclitus (535-475) insisted that all things were in perpetual states of becoming, ever in flux—a view famously summarized: “You cannot step in the same river twice”.¹³⁸ When Heraclitus looked at the world, he saw fire: changing, exploding gloriously, then burning out. This change was ordered according to reason, *logos*, and was not chaos—but movement was essential to existence. *Logos* is a category of harmony, the transformative balance of opposites, rather than an immutable law with purposed ends.¹³⁹ But Parmenides (515-445) sought to see through the surface of the contingent world and claimed that all things, even time itself, were not real. Instead, all-that-is exists only as the shadows of real objects that lay beyond our deceptive senses, perfect and indivisible, immovable and immutable, which lend similar definition to our world of coming-into-being and passing-away.¹⁴⁰ “What-is is” and can only be as-it-is, for two reasons. First,

¹³⁷ John Burnett, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: A&C Black, 1920), 6.

¹³⁸ William Harris, *Heraclitus: The Complete Fragments*, retrieved <http://users.humboldt.edu/jwpowell/heraclitusTransBillHarris.pdf>, 11. Retrieved March 8, 2019.

¹³⁹ Eunsoo Kim, *Time, Eternity, and the Trinity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 61.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 63-65.

there is no such thing as non-being, or nothingness, for it cannot be spoken of or truly thought. Second, as everything exists already, in some form whether physical or mental, “it is the same thing that can be thought and that can be”.¹⁴¹ Therefore what-is must be eternal, unique, and immutably impassible—for there is no nothingness into which that-which-is might expand, move, change, emerge, or vanish. The world, when subjected to reason, is revealed as fundamentally immobile. The majority of Greek thought, inherently distrustful of the material life, followed Parmenides in varying fashions: being is true reality, preferable to becoming. Yet, two poles quarrel: existence/divinity as *being*, or existence/divinity as *becoming*.

Plato (428/7 or 424/423–348/7) comes next, spoken through his master Socrates. For him, that which was perfect—the beautiful, the good, the true, and so on—was found only in the ‘forms’ of those ideals; perfections that lay beyond our imperfect, shadowy world.¹⁴² In this perfection, these greatest forms could never increase or decrease, could never become, could never change or shift—for to become better or worse would plainly show that they were not truly perfect.¹⁴³ These perfections are that of which our world is only a copy—thus, we *become* while the thing-itself continues only to *be*.¹⁴⁴ Insofar as our world of change and suffering participated in the forms of the ideal, it, too, was perfected, in ways restricted by our matter. In this ontological dualism, the forms shone on in their perfect beatitude—ever informing us, material dreamers of form made by a lesser demiurge, but never the other way ‘round.’¹⁴⁵ We can only ever seek to perceive

¹⁴¹ William Smith, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (Boston: Little, 1870), 124.

¹⁴² Plato, *The Republic*, 7.514a.

¹⁴³ Joseph Hallman, *The Descent of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Kim, 65–67. Plutarch (46–120) of Middle Platonism, wherein he understood Plato to be saying that the first-moving divine, by necessity beyond coextensive time and space, must be a pure actuality in eternity (*Ibid*, 69).

their imperishable, unaffected, and unchanging transcendence. But Plato's influence on Christianity would be minimal when compared with his student Aristotle (384-322). Rather less concerned with the universals than his predecessor, Aristotle focused on that which presently was—not so much what united existence, as what differentiated it. Divinity, for Aristotle, was found in the origin of being, the famed “unmoved mover”, rather than amidst a pantheon of perfect forms. But just as with Plato, Aristotle's divinity was changeless, ageless, and impassible. If it were to be affected by anything, it could not be the “unmoved mover” or the “first cause” for our world of particularized and compound form and matter.¹⁴⁶ Causation has to stop somewhere with an existence that was self-existent, perfectly impassable, and absolutely actual, without a hint of potency that would divide it into pre-existing parts and end its usefulness as “first cause.” With nothing to precede it, effect it, adjust it, or change it, this perfect actuality must be unmovable mind-itself, contemplating only itself.¹⁴⁷

The primary schools of Greek thought at the time of Christianity's birth each held their own perspective, as well. For the Stoics, the divine tended to be an active principle in an ordered universe, a sort of pantheism: God-in-the-world. The entire universal order, in its pre-determined being, is active by the divine—but precisely in an activity that is unchanging and determined, and to whose cyclical flow humanity must learn to adjust itself.¹⁴⁸ The divinities and divine energy of the world were as equally disinterested in mortal temporality as mortals should be in the becoming and changes of life.¹⁴⁹ Cynics

¹⁴⁶ Marc Cohen, “Aristotle's Metaphysics: Substances and Universals,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2016).

¹⁴⁷ Hallman, 10-11.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 12

¹⁴⁹ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord IV: The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, trans. Oliver Davies, Andrew Louth, Brian McNeil, John Saward, and Rowan Williams (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 230. Hereafter, *GL IV*.

sought the path to freedom and *eudaimonia* from all the arrogance and false judgments of passions and controlling influences of unnatural, human powers.¹⁵⁰ Epicureans sought to live a balanced life in the true and enduring pleasures of the mind freed from the passion and fears of the “bitter gift” of life, alike to the deities who detach their inner life from that of the world. Indeed, all the early Hellenistic schools shared one goal in common: *apatheia*, escape from the world of becoming, with its contingencies and disturbances and wild emotions, into a world of blissful and tranquil being—even if it was only in one’s mind. That was the essential plumb line of Hellenistic philosophy; *being* over *becoming*.

2.2: Early Christianity (0-600)

It could be said that one of the main events of the earliest Christian theology was the crashing together of Parmenides and Heraclitus, along with the mysterious Hebrew divinity of both immanence and distance, in a spectacular wreck with the excessively human experience of Jesus Christ, as found in the gospels. The problems presented by divine humanity collided headlong with the prevailing Hellenism in which Parmenides, as re-interpreted through Plato, had mostly won out. Indeed, early witnesses seemed quite unsure as to the collision they had just observe, a fact which Balthasar found immensely and fascinatingly fruitful.¹⁵¹ Ignatius of Antioch (35-107) is the first to have extant writings that touch upon the concerns of God’s immutable and impassible experience—yet, it is only in passing, as he intends to follow the “passion of my God” and encourages

¹⁵⁰ A. A. Long, "The Socratic Tradition: Diogenes, Crates, and Hellenistic Ethics", in *The Cynics*, ed. R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, 29.

¹⁵¹ Kilby, 22; Nichols, “Christology”, 318.

brotherliness “by the blood of God,”: change and suffering.¹⁵² Yet, Ignatius also affirms that attributing suffering to God apart from the Incarnation is wrong, for that one is “above seasons, timeless, invisible, who cannot be touched.”¹⁵³ In this way, Ignatius serves a pattern for what is normalized in the Patristics—a double insistence upon attributing passions, suffering, and experiences to the divine in one way, whilst also insisting that God remain impassibly and immutably, in another. Of Jesus Christ, Ignatius keeps a paradox, with perhaps more than a hint of processional ‘becoming’: “possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh...first passible and then impassible.”¹⁵⁴ Pope Clement I (35-99) echoes Ignatius’ language: God needs nothing and wants for nothing—except our confession to him.¹⁵⁵ Soon thereafter, the most successful of Christian Gnostics, Valentinus (100-160) became well-known for entwining greater Platonism and Christianity, refusing any idea that Jesus Christ, and therefore the divine, could participate in any way with the corrupt, suffering, material world of phenomena—rather, this world of change was to be escaped by *gnosis* into the higher realms of psychic and spiritual existence.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE), synthesizer of Hellenism and Judaism, wrote one of the first monographs on God’s immutability, claiming it great piety to say the divinity may change—for what could restrain his power? Yet, this may be done only perfectly, untroubled by unstable emotions or be made to by exterior powers.¹⁵⁷ God-as-Cause enlivens the world at a distance from its troubling matter, through aspectual intermediaries, that allow him to

¹⁵² JK Mozely, *The Impassibility of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 6.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 8.

¹⁵⁴ Mozely, 9.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 8; Hallman, 31-33.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 16-17.

¹⁵⁷ Hallman, 23-25. Numenius of Apamea (2nd century CE) wrote: "What is Plato but Moses speaking Attic Greek?"

remain transcendent.¹⁵⁸

Melito of Sardis (Early 2nd-180) writes of the “impassible suffering” and the “immortal dying,” explained by a separated “pledge of two substances.”¹⁵⁹ But Melito doesn’t offer precise explanation on how this ‘pledge’ works—it simply stands as explanation for how the divine *in Christ* can suffer, while God remains untouched.¹⁶⁰ Justin Martyr (100-165) attributes the incarnation to a willingness to “share in suffering,” but without any passion upward to the divine nature. As his disciples wrote, Christ came to be by participation, not abscission. Indeed, Justin understood Greek philosophy to be inspired by Old Testament truth: God as the static I AM; the unchanging of 1 Samuel 15 and Numbers 23, the ever-constant anchor for the changing world of Malachi 3.¹⁶¹ Theophilus of Antioch (Early 2nd-183/5), reflecting a growing Eastern emphasis, wrote that God could accurately be said to experience anger and mercy, but was unchangeable insofar as no outside force could influence or coerce his constancy.¹⁶² While Athenagoras of Athens (133-190), leaning opposite, criticized the myths and fables: no anger, no desire, nothing at all mutable found in Godself.¹⁶³ This emphatical difference came to its first head when the hyper-Platonism of Valentinian Gnosticism was coming into its own and Irenaeus (130-202) firmly faced it with certain re-assertions: the divine transcendence was utterly self-sufficient, beyond all possibility or temporality—yet, though, the “unmeasured Father was Himself subjected to measure in the Son, for the Son

¹⁵⁸ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Grand Rapids, 1993), 268-270.

¹⁵⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975), 177.

¹⁶⁰ Mozely, 9 -10.

¹⁶¹ Even going so far as to claim that Socrates and Heraclitus were Christians. Mozely, 12; Hallman, 31-33.

¹⁶² Mozely, 14.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 14.

is the measure of the Father.”¹⁶⁴ While the Gnostics insisted on answering the problems simply (that the divine is not subject in any way to experience or suffering, and so Christ only appeared to be mortal), Irenaeus insisted on paradox, speaking both in terms of Christ’s divine unity and also the reality of his sufferings and experiences. With the same sort of paradoxical “becoming” language as Ignatius, Irenaeus writes that the Word was made “a passable man,” for God must absorb into his incorruptibility our corruption—some sort of “experience” but not in his own “nature.”¹⁶⁵

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) set a standard when he said that God comprehends, and so engages with, existence not *as* an existence, but as self-apprehension of his own will to create all existences. Thus, all appearances of God’s changes, experiences, and sufferings is our ontologically-incompatible perception of how God can engage only with himself. Clement tenaciously insisted, far more than his predecessors, that there are no true affections in God, and thus, no *real* positive relationship to the world, only a negative dissimilarity.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Clement went so far as to say that Jesus had no pleasure or pain, only balance, and didn’t even eat out of need—he only ate in order to prove to Docetists that he had a body.¹⁶⁷ Yet, it was his pupil Origen (184-253) who would pull back in the opposite direction.¹⁶⁸ While still spiritualizing the supposed anthropomorphisms of the Hebrew Bible,¹⁶⁹ Origen speaks easily of the divine pity and him “suffer our sufferings.” Origen saw this not so much a

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 14-15.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 23-24.

¹⁶⁶ Mozely, 53.

¹⁶⁷ Even Christ’s love is “merely” an active will, and his suffering did not reach to his soul. Mozely, 57; Hallman, 189.

¹⁶⁸ Contra Celsus, who criticized the Christian God as imperfect by appearing to change and suffer. Hallman, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Making wrath not an affect, but something like a “will to discipline,” for instance.

change as a descent: the divine did not change from being good, beautiful, or bliss, for even enfleshed, he knew no sin or joylessness; “the physician who touches the wound does not himself contract.”¹⁷⁰ Within the economy, Christ descended, although the divinity did not change,¹⁷¹ having already in himself love as a passion and grief as a response to love rejected—indeed, noble expressions for the divine.¹⁷² At the same time, however, Origen insists with his master that “of passion and change, he remains unmoved and unshaken forever on that peak of blessedness,” yet while tantalizingly wondering if “perhaps the Father too is not without *pathos*...”¹⁷³ Origen has his cake and eats it, too: a God who feels and experiences genuine compassion, love, and suffering, but who also experiences nothing in his divine blessedness—a paradox surmounted somehow by descent.¹⁷⁴

The development of these issues became one of the earliest widespread controversies of Christianity: Modalistic Monarchianism and Patripassianism,¹⁷⁵ dynamisms found in the teachings of Noetus, Sabellius, and Praxeas (mid-to-late 3rd c.), though perhaps somewhat twisted by their opponents. Under Sabellius’ subtly and nuance, in particular, the Father was found as light and the Son as radiance, allowing passibility in a particular mode, while impassible in another.¹⁷⁶ Tertullian (155-240), father of Latin theology, attacked these ideas as “crucifying of the Father,” insisting that

¹⁷⁰ Donald Dawe, *The Form of a Servant Motif* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 55.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁷² Richard Creel, *Divine Impassibility* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 3.

¹⁷³ Mozely, 62-63; Henderson, 118; Hallman, 40-46.

¹⁷⁴ Creel, 72-73.

¹⁷⁵ The former being that there is no distinctions within God, but instead he is One functioning in three different modes. This leads to the latter: the Father directly suffered in the Son’s sufferings (Pelikan, *Emergence*, 178).

¹⁷⁶ Mozely, 29-30, 36; Pelikan, *Emergence*, 178.

the divine persons differed in true substance, not merely in appearance.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, Tertullian pushed his own views to an opposite extreme: not only did the Father not experience suffering or change by incarnation, neither did the Son. “In his own name,” the divine spirit of God did not suffer in any way—for Christ was of two starkly separated natures.¹⁷⁸ Yet, even hostile Tertullian, the major exponent of a totally stoic God,¹⁷⁹ couldn’t avoid using such common language as “God born”, “the suffering God” or “dying God,” and finally could only state: “let it be enough to say that Christ the son died, and this because it was so written,” true because it is impossible.¹⁸⁰ Hippolytus (170-235), disciple of Irenaeus and pseudo-schismatic, concurrently insisted that the suffering of Christ could not leave the Father unaffected without destroying their unity. For Hippolytus, it was easy to imagine that God could, in his unity, bear himself, himself suffer himself, and himself raise himself—all experiences within the godhead, but really, truly, present to humanity.¹⁸¹ Thus, the struggle continued. It was impossible to reject the suffering Christ, but it was unthinkable to ascribe that suffering in undifferentiated form to God himself.

Novatian (200-258) provides one of first full explanations for the interplay of paradoxical divine and human experience: there is an analogous relationship between mortal and immortal passions, even as they couldn’t be more separate in nature. Thus, the passions cannot corrupt the divine in the way they corrupt the mortal, for perfect divine passions proceed from reason in perfect concord, rather than in coercive irrationality.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Mozely, 31; Pelikan, *Emergence*, 179-180.

¹⁷⁸ Mozely, 38-41.

¹⁷⁹ Warren McWilliams, *The Passion of God* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 38.

¹⁸⁰ Pelikan, *Emergence*, 177-178; Hallman, 64.

¹⁸¹ Pelikan, *Emergence*, 180; Dawe, 54.

¹⁸² Mozely, 45; Hallman, 72-73.

Gregory Thaumaturgus (213-270) dedicates an entire treatise to the topic of God's immutability and impassibility: could God not if he willed it? If not, how could God be restricted by a power, even himself, outside of his control? He determines that such a clash of nature and will can only occur in contingent and constituent mankind, whereas in divinity, there is a total and simple freedom of will. Furthermore, suffering would only be suffering for God if he acted in any way useless or without advantage—whereas suffering that humanity might be healed: “in God those are not to be counted as suffering which, of his own will, were born by him up to the common good of the human race.”¹⁸³ Thus, Gregory can thoughtfully declare that it is in the very suffering of God that his impassibility is revealed, for God's suffering is an act of impassible will, not contingency. God experiences nourishment, growth, sleep, toil and all human experiences not as afflictions, but as almighty choice.¹⁸⁴ Lactantius (250-325), with an entire treatise dedicated to the anger of God, insisted that the divine must be in motion if he is to be alive—is the divine to be called deaf and blind? The providential God cannot be the Epicurean god of empty distance, no, God experiences anger and grace not as victim, but as their perfection.¹⁸⁵ Hilary of Poitiers (310-367) pressed impassibility quite far: humanity was taken into God by Christ, but in such a way that he “emptied himself”, in tandem with his nature, and voluntarily assumed up a body, but its needs were not made requisite upon him.¹⁸⁶ Jesus certainly ate, slept, drank, and wept, but not because he was compelled by hunger, exhaustion, thirst, or sorrow. God remained himself, even reduced

¹⁸³ Mozely, 66-67, 81-82.

¹⁸⁴ McWilliams, 12-13.

¹⁸⁵ Hallman, 67; Mozely, 49-51.

¹⁸⁶ *MP*, 27; Dawe, 57.

and relinquished, because he so chose to engage in transition.¹⁸⁷

Here, then we reach the first great conciliar clash over the relationship of the man Jesus to the divine. Essentially all agreed on a paradox of an impassible, immutable God and a divine God-man in Christ, but Arius (256-336) attempted definitive explanation: Jesus was only a pre-eminent and deified creature, unshackled from God to fully experience humanity.¹⁸⁸ For Arius, there was no other honest option amidst the Greek metaphysics of the time.¹⁸⁹ Against this definition arose most prominently Athanasius of Alexandria (296/8-373), vehemently condemning the Arian solution that Christ was not deity. Athanasius insisted that Christ was equal to the divine and so impassible, but within the flesh that he put on, it was appropriate to ascribe to him that which is natural to the flesh (“the Logos who could not die in himself, took on a body capable of death...”).¹⁹⁰ In that unity, Christ triumphed over, rather than succumbed, to the suffering of the body and, thus, kept his full impassible and immutable divinity.¹⁹¹ At the Council of Nicaea in 325, Athanasius won the day, Arius and his followers were excommunicated and exiled, and the council affirmed that Jesus Christ, the Son, was truly God, coeternal with the divine, and begotten of the same substance (*homoousion*). Yet, it went unexplored how an immutable and impassible Father and an experiencing and suffering Son could share the same substance and identity. They yet remained both, paradoxically, true,¹⁹² allowing the Arian position to remain admixed throughout burgeoning

¹⁸⁷ Mozely, 102-103; O’Hanlon, 12-13; Hallman, 104-105.

¹⁸⁸ Mozely 75-76. “The Word [as human like us] himself changeable, but by his own free will he remains good.”

¹⁸⁹ Charlene Burns, *Divine Becoming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 40.

¹⁹⁰ Henderson, 118; *MP*, 20.

¹⁹¹ Hallman, 84; Dawes, 56-57; Mozely, 85; Burns, 41-42.

¹⁹² Balthasar specifically cites Tertullian, Novation, and Lactantius as sources for a *moving* divine life. *TD V*, 216.

Christendom for quite some time. One small council would come to a compromise of ‘likeness’, another would denounce Athanasius’ own extremity and exile him, another would reaffirm the Arians, and another would reject them. But how could the problem be solved? The foremost Christians had always lived in a tension of suffering and impassibility and, by now, the tension was wearing thin. Nicaea and the following engagements had been the first cracks, and in the coming decades, new bishops and theologians would build upon what Nicaea had established.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390), along with the other Cappadocians, started to speak more precisely of the two-natures in Christ; that he was “passible in his flesh, impassible in his godhead.”¹⁹³ This union of natures was what made it reasonable to speak of the divine person as subject of human experience; yet more a *commucatio idiomatum* of names than actual experiences.¹⁹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa (335-395) wrote against Apollanarians (who believed Jesus essentially was a divine mind piloting a human body, threatening to bring mortality and possibility into God) by insisting that God could never die—it was not God himself, but rather, a person who *was* God that suffered.¹⁹⁵ These Cappadocian Fathers tended to suggest that a significant, if not primary, intention of God in the incarnation was to overcome the awful mutability of our matter by joining its nature with his immutable one, so that humanity might share his blessedness. To this end, he was passionless—if passions are understood to be that which always leads to sin.¹⁹⁶ Cyril of Alexandria (376-444) and Pope Leo I (400-461) both reached similar conclusions as the Cappadocians: that in Christ, two natures were

¹⁹³ Dawe, 58-59.

¹⁹⁴ Mozely, 87.

¹⁹⁵ Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 198-200.

¹⁹⁶ Hallman, 90.

indivisibly joined and therefore could both be spoken of as the subject of experience—even though the divine could not change, suffer, or experience that which the truly mortal truly did.¹⁹⁷ This was a one-way street: the divine imparts to the mortal, but no humanization to the divine.¹⁹⁸ Yet, a gap was still opening within this space, as Cyril and the Alexandrian school became a center of emphasis for the union of these natures, while the Antiochene school and their foremost participants, Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428), Nestorius (386-450), and Theodoret (393-458/66), emphasized the separate nature of this union to ensure that no parts became mixed.¹⁹⁹

This came to head as Nestorius respectfully thought *Christokos*, Christ-bearer, was the most accurate title for Mary and that *Theotokos*, God-bearer, went too far into incoherency. How could an eternal God experience beginning in birth? Uncompromising, Cyril understood this to mean that Nestorius, to some extent, rejected the divinity of Christ, even as Nestorius was concerned that Cyril's emphasis did violence to the separate natures and did not sufficiently insulate the divine.²⁰⁰ Theodoret and Nestorius insisted, against Cyril's theological demands, that it could not be said that the divine "tasted death" in the flesh—it was only the form of the human servant that experienced life and suffered in death, while the form of God in the Son made the suffering *accountable* to him, but not *experienced* by him.²⁰¹ Meanwhile, Cyril believed Nestorius was not nearly firm enough, though he himself skirted the opposite line in saying that the divine Word, the Son, could suffer "in the flesh," as "in the crucified body, [he] made the

¹⁹⁷ "An authentic theology was apophatic," or "he remained what he was, what he was not, he assumed"—both an economy beyond human comprehension and ability. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 268, 277; Mozely, 88.

¹⁹⁸ Henderson, 118; *MP*, 26-27; Dawe, 58-59.

¹⁹⁹ Hallman, 100; Burns, 46-47.

²⁰⁰ Henderson, 27-28.

²⁰¹ Mozely, 89.

suffering his...in an impassable manner.”²⁰² As the disagreement became more publicly intense, Emperor Theodosius II convoked the Council of Ephesus (431), filled with politicking and deception, which resulted in the first full schism as the Church of the East, a deep divide all over this single question: how to rectify the human experience of Jesus with the obviously impassible and immutable deity?²⁰³ Arguments about what counted as Nestorianism, and whether those like Cyril had slipped into an opposite error of Apollinarianism²⁰⁴ continued to plague Christendom, as a particularly fervent anti-Nestorian, Eutyches (380-456), believing Christ had a unique nature, went beyond Cyril to thus say that Christ was not “consubstantial with men,” and therefore stopped mutability and suffering from reaching into the godhead. The ongoing fault line demanded another universal council which was convoked in 451 at Chalcedon. Founded upon the work of Cyril and Leo, the Council affirmed the famous Chalcedonian definition, contra-Eutyches, Nestorius, Arius, and perhaps even restraining any Cyrillian excess.²⁰⁵

“...perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man...consubstantial with the Father according to Godhead and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood...to be acknowledged in two natures, unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably, the distinction by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one Person (prosopon) and one Subsistence (hypostasis), not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son...”²⁰⁶

²⁰² The terminology had become thick—what did it mean to “taste death,” or have “union”? What meaning would a Latin or Greek read into words like *ousia*, *physis*, and *prosopon*? Mozely, 93; Burns, 48-50.

²⁰³ It was opened before Nestorius’ supporters arrived, and without Nestorius himself—resulting in an order for his ecclesial removal and exile. When the Pro-Nestorian bishops arrived, they convened their own council which condemned and deposed Cyril, which led to his own arrest. A series of underhanded interventions ended with Nestorius’ exile, the restoration of Cyril, and the schism of the Church of the East.

²⁰⁴ Dawe, 60-61.

²⁰⁵ Mozely, 96.

²⁰⁶ The later Constantinopolitan Council would insist on two natural volitions or wills in Christ, but did little to resolve the difficulty of *how* this could be. Henderson, 28.

Thus, the majority of Christendom affirmed what had been the unexplained paradox tracked back to Ignatius: in some way, Christ was both God and Man in union (now called *hypostatic*, or substantial, union), yet also separate, without confusion or separation. Chalcedon did not concern itself with the *how* of this union, it was content merely to set boundaries for what was, then, considered orthodox by Christendom. Yet, Chalcedon's technical Greek, subject to varying interpretations, would split Christendom once again. In Eastern churches, to become Coptic and Orthodox, "two *physes*," was believed to stray away from unity and toward Nestorianism, it became common to speak of the exchange or properties between the natures, of the deification or *theosis* of humanity into divine likeness, making the gap between the two realities much smaller.²⁰⁷ The resulting split caused the persecution of dissenters, of Christians by Christians, for many years to follow and hardened bitter feelings that have only recently begun to thaw.²⁰⁸ Such is the profound depth of importance placed upon this question, so varyingly answered, of how the impassibly transcendent divine and mutably mortal might intersect. Amidst the paradoxical tension of both, Chalcedon had established the general rule that the paradoxical tension was *good* and that to abandon it in either direction would result in heresy.²⁰⁹

After Chalcedon, opinions entered a holding pattern—perhaps more by the influence of one man, than even a whole council. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) rose meteorically from pagan Hellenism to formulate ideas that would influence Christendom and Western civilization, perhaps more so than any other single individual. Augustine's

²⁰⁷ Burns, 51.

²⁰⁸ Mozely, 96.

²⁰⁹ Paul Gavriluk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 49-50, 155-156.

opinion echoed Clement in affirming the ancient Hellenistic intuition: the movements of passion are contrary to the ultimate virtue of reason, and therefore, the Ultimate and Absolute Divine cannot possess such. The “I AM” of Exodus was the beginning and end of Augustine’s understanding of God’s perfection: to *be* is perfect, to *become* is the cessation of perfection.²¹⁰ In God, everything is perfect and perfectly concordant; goodness and immutability and mercy are synonyms in the simple divine being.²¹¹ There is no analogy between what we experience and what God is, indeed his immutability and creation’s mutability are the definitive difference between them, leaving God inflexibly uninfluenced and utterly unvexed by anything external as an eternal, selfsame, successive moment: “who can sanely say that God is touched by any misery?”²¹² All appearance of change in divinity is on the side of his *effects*, which proceed from his singular, evident being. God loves, creates, gives mercy, dispenses justice, and is good all in the same eternal action—but *these are not affects*.²¹³ Thus, in Christ, God was made alike to the soul of man and its body; the divine became the enlivening element, like smelting fire that is in and joined to the iron but is also not the iron—and how absurd it would be that the iron should change the fire!²¹⁴

As early Christianity concretized more and more into what will be recognized as early Catholicism-proper, supermajority opinion similarly solidified behind Chalcedon and Augustine: an utterly and absolutely unchangeable and unsuffering Father, who took

²¹⁰ As with Origen, Augustine understood all references to movement, change, or experience in God to be ways of getting at the manner of God’s unmoving existence: when words are ascribed to the divine, it says more about his actions toward humanity than it does about his interior experience, “jealous without envy, angry without perturbation, pitiful without grief, repentance without evil, patient without suffering.” Creel, 1.

²¹¹ Hallman, 107.

²¹² Such as the tendency to the “non-being” of timeliness. Mozely, 107-109; Creel, ix; Kim, 78, 81-82

²¹³ Hallman, 108-110.

²¹⁴ Burns, 43.

up Union with human flesh in Christ, and thus can have suffering and change spoken of him, though not properly. The Patristic-era was the story of a God who appeared to be “becoming” understood amidst a philosophical culture which elevated “being” alone. It is the accidents caused by this intersection that would become the impetus for the earliest councils and creeds, as well as the earliest ecclesial splits. But full explanation of how God and Man could truly be fully united, how Jesus and God could be same in substance, and how a God, utterly motionless and apart from all, could be called “love” in any manner recognizable to humans, rarely emerged.²¹⁵ The Patristics held to the “all-sufficiency” of God and his well-ordered nature, yet fell short in comprehending his relationship to the world and historical existence in Jesus Christ. One must ask, did they recast their Jewish inheritance into a Hellenistic mold, translating covenantal faithfulness and moral purity into categories of unchanging immobility and philosophical otherness?²¹⁶ The tendency of this age was to err into paradox and a divinity that could not really be utterly selfsame with Jesus. Balthasar himself notes this as integral to recognize,²¹⁷ for the precarious balancing act of the Patristics, so careful to uphold both paradoxical immanence and transcendence even at the of cost of clarity, would soon “collapse into a dialectic between who God is in himself and who he is to us in Christ” without reference to the Cross in the early Medieval and Scholastic ages.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Christopher Bach wrote the concepts of love and impassibility appear, “as irreconcilable as saying of a geometric figure that it has four corners and no sides.” Creel, 2.

²¹⁶ Fiddes, 38.

²¹⁷ *TL II*, 104-105.

²¹⁸ *GL IV*, 367-368.

2.3: Catholic East and West (600-1500)

We shall open this period with a theologian who straddled both the Patristics and the Early Catholics, and whose work is viewed with high regard by Balthasar: Maximus the Confessor (580-662). A Byzantine theologian, Maximus presented one of the more unique approaches to the problem, which would become emblematic of the Eastern approach. Maximus insisted that salvation meant deification, to become full “participants in the divine nature.”²¹⁹ This dynamic process is founded always in God, moving in reciprocal relationship back into God through creation. The model for Christ already exists in Creation as an unconfused union where God unites with man who reunites with God.²²⁰ Thus, Maximus imagines a God ever-active in giving himself away, only to receive himself back. Even as he remains ever-himself, for God in himself transcends even infinitude, so far that the whole contingent world is included in the gratuity of God’s ‘ever-giving.’²²¹ This alternative mode of existing, rather than solely as dichotomous essence, opened up new vistas of how “experience” might be conceived. Thus, the incarnation, occurring not at the level of nature but at the level of *existence*, is the deifying presence of God in creation, restoring human being by uniting them to the divine on the level of their self-surrendering pattern of living—which is, thereby, to live as fully human and fully divine; the human “transposed” onto the divine mode of existence.²²² More “Man-as-God” than “God-as-Man.”²²³ It is through this deifying action that man

²¹⁹ 2 Pet 2:14.

²²⁰ Burns, 51.

²²¹ McIntosh, 39.

²²² Ibid, 61; Henderson, 37-38.

²²³ Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie : das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekenners* (Einsiedeln : Johannes Verlag, 1961), 207-212. "Are we not invited to a kind of phenomenological glimpsing of the appearance of Christ, who shows us a being who's whole Manor, down to the last word, the least gesture, betrays a human nature, it is human nature transposed and its entirety to another mode of existence? Everything that is human is

knows God, not in his essence, but in his effect, and how the problem is surmounted by bringing the human into the encircling experience of God that is already divine. The Eastern tradition also moved forward in others; as John of Damascus (675-749) insisted upon the divine *apatheia* as the cause of all good—for if we are to be good, we must not be absorbed into the temptations of material existence.²²⁴ Yet, there are innocent and appetitive passions, which may be experienced in the incarnation while leaving God impassible, for he *chose* to feel them.²²⁵ John Scotus Erigena (815-877), an Irishman of the West, held similar views to those in the East: nothing can be accident in the divine nature and it can be accident to nothing without experiencing passable change, ergo, the divine nature is an active diffusing throughout all things. The divine is impassible in the sense of being the ‘passive’ recipient of all things in creation that seek beauty and which he draws unto himself. Erigena recognizes that the scripture seem quite plain in affirming that God “acts and is acted upon, loves and is loved, cherishes and is cherished, sees and is seen, moves and is moved,” yet, faced also with the tradition of immutability, and thus the apparent fact that “love cannot be given or taken,” he is brought to saying that, in the end, God is love because he is its cause and return, for which all long, and not because of an experience of love.²²⁶

It is with Anselm of Cantebury (1033-1109) that the West’s Scholastic era launches. Anselm, perceiving God as “of which nothing greater can be thought,” thought him utterly and totally limitless, timeless, and enclosed by absolutely no boundary of any

found anew in this new way, though it is never more purely human or simply human. Rather it appears mysteriously inhabited by another.”

²²⁴ Mozely, 99.

²²⁵ Ibid, 100-101.

²²⁶ Hallman, 99-100.

sort, existing as a perfect whole.²²⁷ Indeed, for Anselm, God alone has unqualified and perfect existence, “Whereas all other things nearly do not exist at all.”²²⁸ Because of this unqualified existence, he has no “will” or “not will,” nor “be” or “not be.” Whatever the divine is, it is eternally and always, totally and utterly. Anselm culminates Augustine’s thought, while toeing the Patristic line—the utter separation of God demanding one re-image every experience as action. God cannot be said to suffer “anything lowly or weak” due to the “height of his impassible nature,” but rather, such things are to be ascribed to the weakness of “the human substance which he wore.”²²⁹ Peter Abelard (1079-1142) set the stage for the resurgence of Aristotelianism that would define Scholasticism, especially the idea of God as a un-potentiated first motion, conceivable through natural law, whose distant excellence anchored the contingency of the rest of the cosmos.²³⁰ Thus, the governing philosophy of this age became canon in the formula of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), stating that “between the Creator and the creature so great a likeness cannot be noted without the necessity of noting a greater dissimilarity between them.”²³¹ Thus, with the resurgence of Aristotle and Plato in the Hellenistic re-discovery, the fierce patristic balance slowly tipped in favor of a static God, apart from Christ, at the cost of all else.

Scholasticism found its most soaring heights, of course, in Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). As inheritor of the patristics and resurgent master of Aristotle, Aquinas insisted that God, unique in himself, is *the* being without any sort of composites. His

²²⁷ Kim, 91.

²²⁸ Mozely, 110-115.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Moltmann, 209-211.

²³¹ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Fitzwilliam: Loreto, 2002), 171.

love, mercy, justice, goodness and so on are all simply aspectual angles, made by limited faculties,²³² because he is not an instantiated essence, but *being itself*.²³³ Therefore, God is his own only end; his *telos* is nothing other than his existing self, and thus there is nothing that might influence, affect, direct, or suffer in himself.²³⁴ God is pure act, in which no potentiality could exist—a single, total, unified simplicity willing the good ever and always.²³⁵ God is *ipsum esse subsistens*; existence alone as essence.²³⁶ Thus, Aquinas' God is "the pure transcendental act at the summit of all being,"²³⁷ who is necessarily "more event than entity."²³⁸ Because of this, Aquinas insists on a "logical" rather than "real" relationship between God and the world. The relationship is "real" to the creation, who experiences the divine as necessary to exist and as true Other, whereas to the divine, the relationship is "merely logical," as God experiences the world in experiencing himself, not as truly Other or necessity.²³⁹ Thus, God cannot suffer, for he has no potency upon which the action of others may stamp itself.²⁴⁰ As in Boethius (477-524), God is utterly timeless, and unable to experience succession—as if in the determining center of a wheel, to which the entire circumference is equally present to him, but which cannot engage backwards to the center.²⁴¹ All creature-creator

²³² Supplanting "essence" with "existence" is a tricky move by Aquinas/Maritain. An essence-less creature is impossible for Maritain, but for the divine with the act of existing as his essence? That is something else entirely.

²³³ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas* (Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 83; *ST* I.13.11.

²³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (*ST*), I.22.1; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* (*ScG*), 80.4-6.

²³⁵ Mozely, 114-115.

²³⁶ Aquinas, *ScG*, 15.4-5

²³⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Existence and Existent* (New York: Image, 1961), 44; Aquinas, *ST* I.3.4; I.3.7; I.9.1.

²³⁸ Kerr 80, 190.

²³⁹ Aquinas, *ST*, I.13.7, I.45.3. Aquinas struggles to resist having a divine so Other it cannot be known. Frederick Copleston, *Aquinas: An Introduction to Life and Work* (London: Penguin Books, 1956), 134-136.

²⁴⁰ Stephen Fields, "God's Labor, Novelty's Emergence" in *Love Alone is Credible: Hans Urs von Balthasar as Interpreter of Catholic Tradition*, ed. David Schindler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 128.

²⁴¹ Kim, 76-79.

relationships are inherently asymmetrical. We use temporal words about God because we change in circling around him, not because he changes in relation to us. In truth, having past or future, potency, is a defect of perfection.²⁴² In Christ, Aquinas will agree with his predecessors: it is true to say that the soul of Christ was passable, but passions were present in Christ in a manner different than in humanity.²⁴³ Christ felt death as a man, but not as God. He shared in human feeling in restriction to that human nature in hypostatic union with the divine, but not in the divine nature itself—for the “fountain of life” could not run dry.²⁴⁴ It is through the hypostatic union that mankind is able then to participate analogically in the beatific self-vision of the divine.²⁴⁵ Thus, while perhaps not stated explicitly, Aquinas’ God—while called ‘act’ in himself—appears as the most static of beings in relation to creation.²⁴⁶

At its heart, the medieval age repeated and exegeted the categories of Augustine, who was himself operating in the heavily neo-platonic atmosphere aimed at escaping the passions and, with them, the material and historical efforts of terrestrial existence. But as this emphasis was expanded upon in the medieval age, the abstract was elevated to a place of great honor, while the particularities of Jesus’ earthly life were diminished. A

²⁴² Fiddes, 54-55.

²⁴³ The major voices of the time will agree with Aquinas: Duns Scotus (1266-1308) utilizes Aristotle to show the same Augustinian separations, which Christ overcomes with his separate natures. Meister Eckhart’s (1260-1328) hypostatic union marked the end of the infinite-finite “abyss”, overcoming the difference of the two natures by a fusion in one person. Thus, creaturely categories may be spoken of divinity, as mediated in Christ, making the divine nearly univocal with the world; without need of analogy. Mozely, 117-119; Henderson, 35-38.

²⁴⁴ Moltmann, 229.

²⁴⁵ This is what Balthasar and Przywara will later employ to show how scholastic philosophers misused Thomas to create an ontologically static and motionless God, whereas Thomas’ usage of the *analogia entis* reveals a lively doctrine of divine participation, related truly to the world. Nichols, *Word Abroad*, xv; Jay Richards, *The Untamed God* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 122.

²⁴⁶ While this wording heightens prior Augustinianism, Aquinas does hesitate to say univocally that “God does not change”—rather, he speaks *via negativa* about that which is unsuitable to talk about God. Fiddes, 52.

God was unknowingly begun to be fashioned that would be birthed fully in the Enlightenment: a distant, logical explanation for the world; an ultimate cause and primordial model for an objective system of axioms—but whose relationship to the world was not truly *real*.²⁴⁷ This God was made remote and abstract, the hypostatic union ever more thinly stretched by the age's emphasis on the *via negativa*—a knowledge of God that was becoming ever-more recessive through the dissimilarity inaugurated at the Fourth Lateran Council. Minimized in this time was the patristic thread that recognized the “gorgeous certain proportion” between the creature and God.²⁴⁸ While Balthasar had deep respect for the theologians of this era, one of his severe problems with Scholasticism was its venturing into transcendent extremity. For him, a robust patristic and Chalcedonian balance regarding God's relationship to the world was being supplanted by an “ontological monism” that tends to universal abstraction, and eventual opacity, in order to safeguard the divine from the tumults of what was an immensely tumultuous age.²⁴⁹ Is it truly best to attempt understanding God from God's own top-down perspective? Is that an option open to humanity? Will that way lead to a God we can recognize and relate to? Balthasar, and history, hesitate on these accounts. Have we not left out in the epistemic cold the experience of the sole *analogia entis* in Christ? Could we really ever lay claimant to a divine “top-down” perspective in a world we can only perceive mortally, from “bottom-up”? Is not a God understood as entire abstraction *via negative*, connected only logically to the world, one that will eventually vanish

²⁴⁷ *GL IV*, 368.

²⁴⁸ *GL IV*, 394-395.

²⁴⁹ Henderson, 35-37.

entirely? These questions swirl as we approach modernity, through the age of Reformation.

2.4: The Reformation and Beyond (1500-1700)

Of the many things Martin Luther (1483-1546) insisted upon with fiery passion and zealous bellowing, central was that all theological knowledge must be “wisdom of the cross”—even if it didn’t play itself out consistently in his work. For him, God was nothing other than love revealed on the cross—this was his self-proclaimed starting point, rather than a philosophical image of God.²⁵⁰ This chafed against medieval culture, which had so abrogated Jesus from earthly existence that most depictions of him were as distant judge rather than fellow human.²⁵¹ Thus, Luther was intent on recapturing the centrality of a Christ who “bore our sorrows and shared our griefs” and so developed a kenotic “two-state Christology.” This God is known from shame and historical experience rather than the philosophical and cosmic rationality of rational that had become entrenched in Catholicism.²⁵² The first state, *humiliation*, is the ‘form of God’ hidden from external sight, within the ‘form of Servant’ Jesus. The second, *exaltation*, is the ‘form of God’ bursting forth after his resurrection and ascension. But it is the same God, who merely gave up his external appearance and activity, but not his essence, so as to experience the externals of life in such a way as to truly be a “comfort” to us.²⁵³ Thus, Luther also understood the *communication idiomatum* as a greater exchange than just names and attribution. Instead, it is some sort of real experience, going so far as to say that the divine

²⁵⁰ Moltmann, 208-209.

²⁵¹ Dawe, 67.

²⁵² Moltmann, 209-211.

²⁵³ Dawe, 69-70.

nature did, indeed, suffer by taking in union human nature—as if the divinity, in Christ, could retract his actualities into potentialities.²⁵⁴ This is Luther’s ‘Theology of the Cross,’ “man’s true Theology and knowledge of God.”²⁵⁵ But Luther’s goal was never to fully comprehend divine mysteries or to have an absolutely coherent theology. Above all, Luther was a pragmatic man who declared truth only insofar as it made practical impact upon the lives of those he spoke to. Luther affirmed Jesus was God and Man, but the *how* made little difference—his “theology of the cross” remained metaphysically unmined.²⁵⁶

John Calvin (1509-1564) is, as he often was, much more clear and distinct than Luther: nothing happens *to* God, only *by* God.²⁵⁷ Rather than the blending experience Luther danced around, Calvin aimed to be enormously clear that the natures of Christ were separate and never shall truly meet. God, selfsame with his plan and providence, works all things out in solemn sovereignty, thus it is metaphysically impossible that there should ever be any other true cause that might impact God. Change is as alien to him as “ignorance, or error, or powerlessness.”²⁵⁸ Just as with Augustine, any thought of passions or emotions in God must be utterly dismissed. Such language is the simplistic eisegesis of human experience upon the divine; one would do far better to get at the unemotional truth of God’s sheer action, eternally planned and immutably invoked.²⁵⁹ In Christ, the Logos lived a sort of “dual-life”, hidden within the flesh of Jesus, while also

²⁵⁴ Mozely, 123.

²⁵⁵ Moltmann, 212.

²⁵⁶ Burns, 55.

²⁵⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2001) 3.21.1-5.

²⁵⁸ Calvin, 1.17.12; Mozely, 121.

²⁵⁹ “The strength of Israel will not lie, nor be turned aside by repentance; for he is not a man, that he may repent” (I Sam. 15:29). Just as with Augustine, God’s “repentance” only *appears* so to us—the truth is that, despite what appears, everything was, indeed, the divine plan all along. Calvin, 1.17.12.

infinitely transcending Christ's mortal flesh to sustain the universe.²⁶⁰ By Calvin's influence, the definition of God as immutable and without passions, of utter separation and total omnipotence, was planted in the heart of the Western tradition, by way of the Westminster Confession (Chapter 2; 1643-1647) and the Thirty Nine Articles (Article 1; 1536-1571).²⁶¹

After Luther and Calvin, neither Protestant nor Catholic diverged significantly from the general consensus established since Augustine—indeed, even Luther and Calvin say precious little of these issues directly, as we have seen. Certain elements of the Socinians and certain Anabaptist sects²⁶² diverged from the norm, but across the board, the Augustinian orthodox remained.²⁶³ Protestantism continued held in tension the dichotomy of God's capability to will descent and possess mingled natures (Lutheranism) versus God's utterly selfsame will-essence never to meet with finitude, existing only in a third state of Jesus, wherein they lay, enigmatically and subtly, separate (Reformed).²⁶⁴ Melancthon (1497-1560) would draw back from Luther and insist the *communication idiomatum* exists only as predication and not communication,²⁶⁵ while Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) toed a line between the two, with a dash of mysticism, by insisting on both the utter separation of natures and the "community of properties" that inhered together between man and God.²⁶⁶ Pietists like Count Zinzendorf (1700-1760) insist that the deity of Christ truly had to submit to human conditions of learning and limitation, as famous

²⁶⁰ Dawe, 72-73.

²⁶¹ Mozely, 119.

²⁶² Which held non-trinitarian Photinian views of a creaturely Christ and restricted omniscience in the former, and celestial flesh in the latter.

²⁶³ Mozely, 121.

²⁶⁴ Dawe, 78-79.

²⁶⁵ Moltmann, 232-233.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

Pietists hymns by Charles Wesley (1707-1788) would dramatize in hymns and songs by increasing references to the divine emptying necessary to become human.²⁶⁷ The Enlightenment, meanwhile, came to fervor caring very little for the “irrelevant” categories of *hypostasis*, *physis*, and *ousia* and the literal historical experience of God. Instead, it moved into, first, the distant Deism of a clockmaker who set the world in motion and left it be, with only minor and inexplicable providential involvement, to be utterly above that which troubled us here.²⁶⁸ Or, second, a divinity that was in tandem with the evolutionary and changing organic processes of the world that were beginning to be discovered in the scientific revolution.²⁶⁹ Finally, the re-entrenchment of Roman Catholicism at Trent established an even harder-line Augustinian-Thomistic view that would last in its entirety until the 20th century. Thus, the age of Reformation lived up to its name, as a noticeable split began to occur between the classical God of Augustine and a reborn-Hereclitian deity, who moved in and among the world. Neither view, though, will satisfy Balthasar—except, perhaps, what little Luther hinted at.

2.5: Modernity (1700-1988)

Whereas for most of history, we lack extant writings that we should like to have, in modernity, we suffer from the blessing of excess. One could spend hundreds of pages rehearsing the opinions of the post-Enlightenment, recorded on millions of pages across thousands of libraries. Rather than retread every possible opinion of the post-enlightenment world, this examination shall “hit the highlights” of an era in which, in an odd sort of way, the question of the immutability or mutability, the impassibility or

²⁶⁷ Dawe, 83-85.

²⁶⁸ Moltmann 239; Dawe, 39.

²⁶⁹ Fiddes, 39-41.

pathos, of the ultimate absolute took on a “watershed” sense, becoming the determinative force that moved one’s theological trajectory.²⁷⁰ This, all under the auspicious shadow of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), the systematician who sought to reduce reality to a unity within absolute idealism, with all dualisms overcome by a synthetic integration. Hegel spoke of a ‘God’, but more likely meant by God “spirit” or “mind” (*geist*); the ultimate rational category to which all overcomings achieve. Thus, Hegel could speak of the divine as the infinite spirit or being (in itself) that must be rendered finite or non-being in death (out of itself), so that it might be dialectically brought into a higher unity of spirit or mind which transcends both (in and for itself).²⁷¹ This God of spirit or mind is not really a person in need of development, rather, spirit, the synthesis between logic and nature, is panentheistically processing the world.²⁷² In his words, “God is a complex dialectical, triadic process of self-actualization through time and history...the ultimate condition of possibility for the totality of experience.”²⁷³ Thus, the incarnation becomes the moment when spirit knows itself, when being becomes aware of itself most intimately through its opposite, and is then released into objectivity to be grasped by all.²⁷⁴ In this way, Hegel accounted for all experience and all becoming. Being to non-being and back again is the essential course of the universe; becoming supersedes and embraces both, as the self-consciousness of the world became aware of its own rationality. The divine Christ is the symbol of all this coming to be, as the exaltation

²⁷⁰ Henderson, 2.

²⁷¹ *MP*, 32.

²⁷² *Logic* refers to the basic and barren abstract structures of reality without substance, while *Nature* refers to the complex, contradictory, and rich experience of reality, without clear structure. Sprit bridges the gap. Dawe, 110.

²⁷³ Burns, 56-57; Dawe, 129.

²⁷⁴ Hallman, 131; Dawe, 104-105.

of spirit after the becoming of self-emptying.²⁷⁵ Of course, this ties the nature of divine and mortal directly to the same mooring—which is the question modernity will work to untangle.

Critical, scientific, and allegorical understandings of divinity began to take stage, as with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), ‘Father of Modern Liberal Theology’, who attempted to translate the incarnation and God’s being into modernity as representative of the human potentially residing in each divided person, which may be brought into deification. Christ’s hypostatic union, and thus the experience of God, is thus metaphor for the process every person is constantly within, growing into deeper levels of divine consciousness.²⁷⁶ Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) followed Schleiermacher’s programmatic questioning, and attributed immutability to mere Hellenistic influence falsifying the readings of Christian texts. He thus rejected such abstract speculations in favor of the practical and present concerns of the Synoptic gospels.²⁷⁷ Classical Augustinians and Thomists, such as Friedrich von Hugel (1852-1925) replied to these movements: while humanity may *want* a sympathizing God who can suffer and experience like they, they *need* a god who can anchor their suffering and give meaning to their contingencies, without becoming lost in them.²⁷⁸ True religion, for von Hugel, requires a transcendent God who can draw us from the mire without being pulled in; a divinity separate from the world entirely.²⁷⁹ Between these two forces, moderate opinions emerged: Isaac Doerner (1809-1884) notes that the idea of experience

²⁷⁵ For Hegel, religion was the symbolic form of that which philosophy was the nonmythical form: the one truth of ultimate reality as “being to not being to becoming.” Dawe, 112-113.

²⁷⁶ Burns, 55.

²⁷⁷ Wesley Wildman, *In Our Own Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 95.

²⁷⁸ Dawe, 133; Bertrand Brasnett, *The Suffering of the Impassible God* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1928), 116-117.

²⁷⁹ McWilliams, 30-34; Henderson, 3-4.

in the divinity is actually completely necessary—otherwise, the divine would know nothing as actual, but only ever as potentials. Thus, the divine fully *became* in the incarnation—a dynamic development, rather than a static “taking on” of mortality. For Doerner, God is “not immutable...there takes place also on God’s side, change, alteration, a permitting of himself to be determined,” yet, God is not entirely so, for then “God would be subsumed into the world process.” Rather, God is immutable in his ethical essence, but not in knowledge or power. True immutability is his unity, character, and the loving incarnation that flows from it.²⁸⁰

These moderating opinions turned more and more frequently to “Kenosis” as a metaphysical principle to mediate the transcendent and human. Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875) suggested a split in the divine attributes between eminent and relational. The former was God-in-himself (power, truth, holiness, love) in the interrelated Trinity, whereas the latter was God’s relationship with the world—omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and so forth. In the incarnation, Thomasius understood Christ to have placed these secondary, nonessential attributes aside and experienced relationality from “the other end” while keeping those former and properly divine properties.²⁸¹ PT Forsyth (1848-1921) turned kenosis from a negation of God’s divinity and into the condensed proclamation of it. Rather than abstract ontologies, the moral essence of Christ’s self-emptying mission of love was positive theology.²⁸² Rather than immutability or impassibility, Forsyth utilized “self-retraction” to describe the new mode of continuity that divinity entered, and yet remained perfectly itself, for there is defect in self-limiting

²⁸⁰ Burns, 58; Hallman, 133.

²⁸¹ Dawe, 97-99.

²⁸² Ibid, 131-133.

one's power—indeed, it is a moral perfection.²⁸³ Just as with Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), it is in the very paradox of divine-become-human that the divine is most perfectly revealed. It is an inexpressible absurdity that overcomes the “infinitely qualitative contradiction between himself and man.” This, by perfectly revealing an unfathomable nature of self-giving love. It cannot be understood, only believed and lived.²⁸⁴ Emil Brunner (1889-1966) carried a similar line, reminding that psychological interpretation of the divine consciousness is a contradiction, as we only find ourselves familiar with that of our mortality—thus, our knowledge is so limited that we could never claim that the divine could not become mutable and passible.²⁸⁵ Finally, Thomas JJ Altizer (1927-2018) took the kenotic line to its utter extreme when he combined the dialectics of Hegel with Nietzsche's famous declaration that “God is dead.” Beginning with creation, the divine had poured out its transcendence into utter imminence, completed in the life and death of Jesus Christ.²⁸⁶ Two-thousand years prior, the divine had made its final movements into non-being, and finally death, when he “ceases to have any reality as a primordial, impassive, eternal, unmoving, isolated being from time and history” and becomes only radical and imminent forward process, a radical “yes” to the here-and-now.”²⁸⁷

While earlier kenotic thought sought a moderating ground between the classical Augustians and the reborn Heraclitus, the latter found unity between the “dissolved God” of ultimate kenosis and the organic sciences of process in its greatest defender: Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). Whitehead brought to culmination the suspicion, starting

²⁸³ Ibid, 136.

²⁸⁴ Charles Gore (1853-1952), one the foremost Anglicans of the 20th century, attempted to close the same gap between infinity and finitude by also focusing on God's kenotic willingness to self-limit, and in incarnating, become self-revelation itself. Ibid, 156-157.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 163-164.

²⁸⁶ Thomas Ogletree, *The Death of God Controversy* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 76-80.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 89-91.

in the Enlightenment, that God and the world, which was now understood to be dynamically alive and organically evolving (rather than statically ordered to particular ends, as in the Aristotelian world), are in a tandem process of coming-to-be and suffering alongside each other in growth toward a world of possibility and beauty.²⁸⁸ For Whitehead, religion was solely what “the individual does with his own solitariness,” for we are consciously alone and call “God” only that which limits possibilities—meaning, for Whitehead, God is the “principle of concretion,” the “price for a thing becoming real.” In this way, God always accompanies the process of the world as both the anticipated order and the realization of the “absolute wealth of potentiality.” This God is a dipolarity, mutable in the prior sense, while immutable in another by ordering all potential values to be particularized and actualized.²⁸⁹ Indeed, for Whitehead, God anchors reality by being the source and reception of all possibility that may be promulgated upon the earth.²⁹⁰ Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000) took Whitehead’s process *philosophy* even deeper into process *theology*; God’s vision does not impose upon the world, rather, the world creates itself out of the primordial ground of possibility that God is—indeed, his essence is as the “eternal possibility for creative actualization.”²⁹¹ Only a God who “becomes” can truly be absolute,²⁹² Hartshorne argues, for being cannot encapsulate becoming, only *becoming* can hold both together; only

²⁸⁸ Both a reaction to the oversystematization of Hegel and a relative to Spinoza’s conflation of God and natural processes. Thus, “strictly speaking, God neither loves nor hates.” Fiddes, 43; Moltmann, 271; McWilliams, 24.

²⁸⁹ Fiddes, 126.

²⁹⁰ Hallman, 138-139.

²⁹¹ Fiddes, 68.

²⁹² Not only absolute, but even only sensible. Hartshorne charges that combining an immutable and classical god with a temporal and contingent universe is, indeed, fully nonsense. Nothing exists without contingency. For Hartshorne, God necessarily existed, but his concrete actuality was contingent. Richards, 162-163.

relativity can be the absolute principle, without excluding being and experiencing itself.²⁹³ Thus, immutability must be swallowed in mutability. The divine's super-relativity altogether absorbs the world into the ever-greater wells of God's possibility, for his singular, necessary existence supersedes the existing universe to contain the dynamic of all possibility, within himself, with nothing external. God is all—but all is less than God, who sits atop the hierarchy of increasingly complex compounds, from atoms to humans to universes, a totality that is experience-itself in all of its parts, immutable only in that it must be so.²⁹⁴

In the midpoint of the 20th century, moderating voices still attempted to find a way forward; holding to a Patristic God both immanent and transcendent. Jurgen Moltmann (1926-Present) is one of the most famous to insist upon the importance suffering in the life of God, calling an unsuffering God “poorer than any man,” for such a God would be so insensitive as to be only a “loveless beloved”, narcissistic in a metaphysical degree, as love is always proportionate to a degree of suffering—and if he cannot suffer, cannot love, cannot truly be, then is he truly a god—“Or is he not rather a stone?”²⁹⁵ God is not subsumed into the process of death, though—it is not truly the death of god, rather, it is death *in* God as a new experience.²⁹⁶ Others insisted on a purely practical solution; Liberation theology, born in South America and reborn in the black experience in North America, insisted, as in James Cone (1936-2018), that the divine

²⁹³ Richards, 73.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 141, 159.

²⁹⁵ Moltmann, 201.

²⁹⁶ This insistence upon death and suffering in God takes on a unique 20th-century intensity, as survivors of horrors like Auschwitz (such as Eli Wiesel) report the death throes of a hung youth, struggling for a half hour upon the noose, and ask “Where is God now?”—with the only viable response being: “Hanging there on the gallows.” As Moltmann writes, any other answer would be blasphemy. An unsuffering God would be insufferable, worse, amidst the 20th century, he would be a demon. Moltmann, 207, 274.

must be co-sufferer with all those amidst the oppressed communities of the world—a co-suffering serving ever as his historical signature—never writ larger than in the incarnated Christ, the “suffering servant” who took humiliation and oppression “into his own history” and triumphed over it.²⁹⁷ Others, still, like Karl Rahner (1904-1984), sought a mystical answer: the elevation of God’s mysterious otherness, that in his experience “our death becomes the death of the immortal of God himself.” Reversing the liberation emphasis, Rahner says that suffering speaks about God, not about us—²⁹⁸ as his most central thesis goes: “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the imminent Trinity is the economic Trinity.” As all existence shares their origin in him and seeks their end in his incomprehensible mystery, so God can *become* in kenosis, for he “who is not subject to change in himself can *himself* be subject to change in *something* else.”²⁹⁹ In the obedient God-man, the divine becomes the absolute savior evidencing salvation; a truly free act that communicates the divine life of Trinity in full accuracy, for it is by self-emptying creation that he always is, offering true hypostatic union to the spiritual human.³⁰⁰

It is here, with a God selfsame as his revelation and not hidden behind it, that we may make the leap to the premiere moderating voice of this debate in the 20th century. Karl Barth (1886-1968) who developed a *theologia crucis* which revealed the cross as the “image of the invisible God” by combining both the two natures and the two states (previously found in Luther) to show how divinity was revealed in humiliation and

²⁹⁷ McWilliams, 55-56, 67. Like Luther, metaphysics weren’t important compared to the practical effect.

²⁹⁸ Moltmann, 201-202.

²⁹⁹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 206-223.

³⁰⁰ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 144; Rahner, 206-218.

humanity in exaltation.³⁰¹ Barth insisted we start with Christ-as-Revelation, rather than natural assumptions of what perfection entails. God is God from the cross, the pure act of God's being is crucifixion—he is able to accept change or limitation, and remain free of the world's necessity, for it is a natural part of his vitality-laden life to freely love.³⁰² For Barth, God's very essence is simply love in freedom, perfectly compatible with whatever free love elects to do, in constancy with itself, free from all external forces.³⁰³ Thus, for Barth, God can be “for us” without requiring us, he can freely create and freely empty and limit himself without becoming bound to existence, and he can remain himself, perfect love in freedom, whether human or divine, in entering every relationship unchanged.³⁰⁴ God's immutability and impassibility are recast in light of divine freedom and love as a constant invitation to “open himself up” to the world, and so also, to the possibility of suffering.³⁰⁵ He is utterly immutable as the “self-affirmation of his freedom and his love,” but this is always “a fresh demonstration of his life.” Barth utterly rejects the Hellenized, “pagan immobility, which is only a euphemistic description of death,” and suggests, instead, the word ‘constancy’ be employed, rather than ‘immutability’ to recognize that God possesses “continuity, undivertability, and indefatigableness” that neither petrifies nor renounces itself. God is free, Lord above all ages, and can engage and partake and alter how he wills, without losing or being untrue to himself. As love-in-

³⁰¹ Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 202-204.

³⁰² Dawe, 167-169; Richards, 115-117.

³⁰³ Ibid, 122-124; Dawe, 170-171; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1*, trans. THL Parker and JLM Haire (London, T&T Clark, 1957), 264.

³⁰⁴ Fiddes, 66-67; indeed, Barth insists that it is a mistake to conflate self-existence and self-sufficiency. God can participate and allow others to participate in himself, so long as he plays the decisive role—the necessary one is not the highest designation, rather, it is the one who loves in freedom. Barth, *CD II/1*:301-307.

³⁰⁵ Dawe, 173; Barth, *CD II/1*:272; Eberhard Jungel (1934-Present) followed Barth in this way, ably placing at the heart of all ontology the notion of the living God submitted to crucifixion, for it is not for us to “demand what God can and cannot include in his divine life.” Fiddes, 64.

freedom, “he can advance and retreat, rejoice and mourn, laugh and complain, be well-pleased and wrathful, hidden or revealed.”³⁰⁶

Lastly, then, we turn back to the Christian East that never quite went along with Chalcedon, and never shifted significantly from its emphasis on the experience of God in descent becoming the experience of man in ascent; indeed, “the motif is so widespread as to leave one with an embarrassment of riches.”³⁰⁷ By the 19th century, the moderating kenotic method that stumbled about through the West, of God giving up of himself to descend to man, was a “cultural ideal shared by the whole nation.” Whether in Gogol, Solovyov, Turgenev, or Dostoyevsky³⁰⁸—the theme is too numerous to follow. But of particular relevance is Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944), who insisted that kenosis be a quality of divine life, not only economically, but immanently. The Trinity should be understood as mutual self-giving and self-emptying between three persons, an exchange rooted in the love that-the-divine-is. Thus, there is no conflict whatsoever in any exterior experience of God in suffering or mutual relationship, of God mutable and passable, for God is already interiorly experiencing all such things himself, as Godself. What we perceive is but extension and manifestation. In the incarnation, the divine *mode* of life was laid aside, but the divine *nature* was fully engaged in the experiences of succession and suffering.³⁰⁹ These thoughts of Bulgakov would influence a young student, recipient

³⁰⁶ Barth calls immutability a “suspiciously negative word.” For him, “Biblical thinking about God would rather submit to the confusion with the grossest anthropomorphism than to confusion with this the primary denial of God...he is immutable but possesses a mobility and elasticity which is no less divine than his perseverance...” Barth, *CD II/1*:495-499, 502.

³⁰⁷ Dawe, 150-152.

³⁰⁸ Perhaps such a sense is best put by Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) in *The Brothers Karamazov*, when one of the titular brothers insists on returning his life’s ticket back to God, after enumerating all the awful and unimaginable sufferings of the world: it just isn’t all worth it, especially if He sits above it all, unperturbed. His brother Alyosha can only respond, eventually, by recognizing that God is not unperturbed. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 401.

³⁰⁹ Dawe, 153-155.

of a static and dry Jesuit Catholicism and contemporary of Karl Barth, whose name was Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Summary: Two Dueling Extremes

We have observed the long expanse of answers to the problem posed by the existence of divinity alongside creation, indeed, *within* human nature in particular. All of the above could be broadly recast as the tug-of-war between two dueling traditions, as Heraclitus' "all-is-change" and Parmenides' "all-is-unmoving" wear different forms throughout the ages. Is the divine changeless? Or is the divine change itself? Is God hidden behind and beneath becoming as being? Or is God becoming itself, absorbing being? Is God-as-man a natural and possible state for God? Or it is an aberration requiring precise stop-gap insulations? The ancient Greeks inaugurated these discussions alongside the Hebrew presentations of a divinity seemingly both static and active. The Jews seemed content in that tension, while the Greeks, for varying motivations, tended to insist on the ultimate perfection of impassibility and immutability. The Patristics struggled to live in the midst of this tension, stamping out beliefs that erred too far on one side or the other by eliminating either the divinity in Christ or the humanity, yet, they themselves could offer little more clarity despite their intense and laborious work.³¹⁰ Augustine, with his emphasis on changeless divinity with Christ's humanity a rare and mysterious exception, irretrievably re-oriented the discussion toward the abstract and Hellenic, setting the medieval age to cement itself ever-more heavily into the Aristotelian

³¹⁰ "This tension in the patristic approach, seen here in the tension between the image and the counter-image...is the source of Balthasar's primary misgiving about the ancient, cosmocentric worldview: that the Fathers could never entirely overcome the neo-Platonic tendency to see multiplicity as a creaturely fall from divine esse." Rodney Howsare, *Balthasar: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 123.

and transcendent categories of a simple God of “pure act”, who’s true relationship to the world tended to be no more than purely logical.³¹¹ The Reformers variously worked to accept or push back against these doctrines, at times trying to return emphasis to the human and sympathetic experience of the divine-in-Christ, while at other times, intensifying the severity with which the divine unchangeably ruled the world. As the Enlightenment dawned and modernity approached, these questions turned in an increasing multitude of directions: can there be a system which accounts for the whole spectrum of being and becoming, capturing even spirit as science captures matter? No, it quickly fell back into one or the other. What has an unsuffering God to do with a suffering and oppressed world? Can a God who knows not truly the gallows justify the 20th century? Or has God died entirely, lost to the immanence of human *being*? Heraclitus is reborn in Process Theology, and Parmenides is buttressed in the classical theologies, who with long breath still upheld the Augustinian/Thomistic explanations. Neither satisfied Balthasar. The classical view seemed to create a divinity so separate from the world as to have no relevance whatsoever, and even more, diminished the divinity of the lived life of Jesus Christ. But the process view seemed to create a deity so close as to be useless. What was the meaning of creating a mythic superhuman or a panentheistic process that could not stand above us to instill the transcendentals, to define reality, as love? Therein Balthasar felt the Patristic problem acutely.

But in the midst of these two warring factions, numerous theologians returned time and again to Paul’s great hymn in Philippians 2, mining its kenosis for some map to

³¹¹ “Scholasticism, for Balthasar, was led astray by its over-emphasis on the one divine esse of God, an approach that neglected divine uniqueness of hypostases and therefore could not provide an adequate explanation for the possibility of the incarnation.” Henderson, 68.

chart the pathways between two extremes, hoping to both respect God's transcendent and sovereign mystery, while recognizing his definitive experience in Christ and the reality of his essence as love. These were unwilling to turn the text simply over to the allegorical and liberal, to process or classical explanations, but simultaneously refused to accept the unmoving and sharp forms of the literal and conservative. Kenosis increasingly became the moderating ideal, in which the divine could remain in some sense perfect and transcendent, while in another sense, lively and participatory in the human; though the explanations were not entirely clear. As the patristics taught, this was a dangerous course to chart, with a myriad of ways in which one might err—as Balthasar, student of the patristics, knew all-too-well. With such a great inheritance now established, with the Heraclitan and Parmenidian cycles of history charted, we may turn to Balthasar proper and comprehend how this theologian, among many of his time, sailed his own ship on his own path, in a memorable way that draws together intuitions stretching back through every era. Shall our original purpose be served? Will Balthasar chart a course true to himself, true to his Christocentric heart, and true to the path that leads between the extremes of theological history? Let us turn now, and be illuminated.

CHAPTER III: BALTHASAR AND THE PROBLEM

3.1: Trinitarian Christology: The First Kenosis

The essence of Balthasar's solution begins with a sort of natural law: "That I find myself within the realm of the world and the boundless community of other existent beings is astonishing beyond measure," certainly arising from an "infinite prodigality"³¹² of the constant awakenings of each "I" to a "Thou." This returns, of course, to the awakening experiences of mother and child, teaching each of infinite individuals that they are "contained, affirmed, and loved in a relationship which is comprehensively encompassing, already actual, sheltering, and nourishing."³¹³ Thus, for Balthasar, existence is an ongoing act of gratuity, of overflowing vitality, which streams from a source that is "beyond all becoming, yet is no mere rigid being...an ever actual event...he grounds the possibility of all creaturely becoming." Balthasar can insist, from self-evident observation of the universe's liveliness, there is a becoming in God "of good death and unconditional self-surrender...even creation as time and space."³¹⁴ As archetype of the creaturely image, that which makes existence so dynamic, relational, engaging, becoming, and, in some way, mortal is, also, sourced in the divine. But how can a universal image of lively gratuity find its archetype somehow in "good death"? In finite in infinite; becoming in being? At last, Balthasar's solution arises, entirely tied up with the internal life of the eternal Trinity.

Within the primordial and eternal life of the divine Trinity, Father, Son, and

³¹² *GL IV*, 615.

³¹³ *GL IV*, 616-617.

³¹⁴ *TL II*, 83.

Spirit, Balthasar sees a fundamentally definitive movement. By nature free to act as he wills,³¹⁵ the Father gathers himself up entirely and, without remainder, gives himself—his deity, his character, his personhood—over to his begotten Son, uncreated, and always the recipient of the Father’s generative act.³¹⁶ In this action, the Father does not develop or become something other than himself, or more than himself, nor lose himself,³¹⁷ for he is just himself in the very act of complete and utter giving-over to the Son—it is his omnipotence on display, to utterly give himself away.³¹⁸ Nor does the Father exist, therefore, in some way prior to the Son—he could not be the movement of self-giving without the Other, eternally present, to give unto.³¹⁹ This total self-giving is, for Balthasar, the very definition of life: “genuinely alive insofar as it grows beyond itself and lets go of itself.” Yet, it is also a sort of death, indeed, a “supra-death” in radical, kenotic self-sacrifice that “is a component of all love and that highest love by which man gives his life for his friends.”³²⁰ Thus, in giving himself totally, the Father is expressing the overflow and prodigality of lively love, which is made manifest in a sort of death by self-emptying, which in being given, becomes the gratuity of life that defines divinity. In the self-giving, the Father truly loves the Son by “letting him be” as the Other, the receiver within the Trinity’s union. Here appears the possibility of a true, mutual

³¹⁵ *TD II*, 256.

³¹⁶ In absolute atemporality, we “must think of the persons who proceeded, the Son and the Spirit, as *letting themselves* be brought forth...the Father’s always already giving Himself away, which we can either go behind nor exhaust, is the ultimate ground for God’s being incomprehensibly more than any finite concept can comprehend.” Thus, the Trinity is fundamentally, and *equally*, groundless, plentitude of love. Subordinationism is avoided: the Son is equally free and voluntary in giving and receiving from the Father. *TD IV*, 323; *TL II*, 136-137, 168; Balthasar, *Theologic III: The Spirit of Truth* trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 226. Hereafter, *TL III*.

³¹⁷ Indeed, being Himself in giving Himself away “undergirds it, renders it possible and goes beyond” the godlessness found in the world, which is true absence, rather than true fulfillment in the Trinity. *TD IV*, 323.

³¹⁸ *TD II*, 257.

³¹⁹ *TD IV*, 323.

³²⁰ *TD V*, 84.

exchange within the godhead itself. This love of the Father alone is credible and encompasses within it all other divine attributes.³²¹

The Son, in return, “allows himself” to be begotten by the Father in such a way that he equally then shares the substance of the Father’s divinity,³²² receiving “the giving in the gift” for the Father is selfsame in the giving.³²³ In doing so, the Son causes gratitude in the Father for allowing him to be begotten, “just as the Son’s willingness contain a gratitude to the Father for his wanting to beget him.”³²⁴ The Father’s defining action is received by the Son’s defining passivity, which responds to a passive state in the Father as he receives the return of love from the Son, who has gleefully invited and received the Father’s whole being.³²⁵ In the Son, the Father’s freely-given self, even his will, is received in free, spontaneous, and eucharistic reception by the Son, who has his own primacy, as the “infinitely other of the Father,”³²⁶ in granting the Father’s desire to freely-give and have his love freely returned. The Son is ever responding to the Father’s expectation of communion in fresh and ineffable ways, which Balthasar describes as “supra-time” and “supra-space,” wherein the self-donation of total deity occurs.³²⁷ This is certainly not a hierarchical spatio-temporal location, nor a before/after dichotomy, but an eternal archetype of distance and relational “letting-be” for the processions, which the

³²¹ The divine aspects all fall under love, free and absolute: ultimate meaning and knowledge (wisdom), the almighty and all-encompassing gift of self (omnipotence/omniscience/omnipresence), refusal to abandon man (justice), emotive compassion (mercy), constancy and promise in the Cross (faithfulness), and the crowning majesty of divine self-gift (glory)—and so on, and so forth. *TL II*, 137-138; Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 84-85.

³²² *TD IV*, 325.

³²³ *TL III*, 226.

³²⁴ The Logos is the thus archetypal form of all creative self-expression of God. *TL II*, 168-169.

³²⁵ *TD V*, 87; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 197.

³²⁶ *TD IV*, 325; *TD V*, 88-89; *TL III*, 226.

³²⁷ *TD V*, 93.

image of temporal space will eventually dimly reflect.³²⁸ The Son's identity is found precisely in being the recipient of the Father's surrender and, in turn, surrendering back to him—an endeavor approaching “risk,” as the Son's infinite other-ness means he must respond freely to the Father. Thus, that vulnerability of giving oneself away, trusting the other to accept and return it. This risk underwrites and enables all other “risks” and “difference” found in the creation of finite freedoms—including the possibility for suffering. Balthasar is clear: “If we ask whether there's suffering in God, the answer is this: there is something in God that can develop into suffering,”³²⁹ when the “recklessness with which the Father gives himself away encounters a freedom that, instead of responding in kind to this magnanimity, changes it into a calculating and cautious self-preservation”—that is, the opposite of the Son's recklessness to joyfully receive.³³⁰

The Spirit, then, embodies the mode of exchange between Father and Son as he exists as their mutual “Yes!” and thus, in himself, possesses the same giving and receiving of divinity.³³¹ Thus, the Spirit proceeds from both, eternally expected and eternally given, and crosses that which is the “primal origin of space...in which the person of the Trinity make room for one another, granting each other freedom of being.”³³² He is the circulating blood of their mutual exchange,³³³ an identity

³²⁸ This dimness between archetype and image must be underlined. Balthasar concurs with Nicholas of Cusa when he calls God “the non-other.” There is no parallel with man and God, for He is the ground of our being, “always within us and against us.” As Balthasar writes: “The deeper the level within ourselves from which our prayer or any other act wells up, the more it is His, but not at all less ours. Rather, most ours when most his.” *TD II*, 194; *TD V*, 94.

³²⁹ Note that this view is contra-Moltmann: suffering will never be something new or unexperienced to God, but always something grown out of his eternal experience. Kilby, 113-114.

³³⁰ *TD IV*, 327-328.

³³¹ Balthasar insists there is “no Christology without an indirect pneumatology,” which reveals the anonymous Spirit, upon whom we cannot “lay our hands.” The selflessness of the Spirit is always pointing beyond itself, to the whole Trinity of divine presence. *TL III*, 27-28.

³³² *TD V*, 93-94.

³³³ *Ibid*, 246.

expropriated from the divine exchange between Father and Son. Such is never stagnant, but always flowing in new and surprising ways that instigate ever-refreshed joy in the persons as love is given, accepted, and returned.³³⁴ Breathed out by both, the Spirit “maintains and seals” the infinite distance, bridging it with the same nature that is gift and reception.³³⁵ Within his archetypal movement, then, the whole creation may image divine participation.³³⁶ Though “supra-experiential,” Balthasar insists this is no process theology; the procession of the persons are not confused or identified with worldly process. The interrelationship of the persons, revealed in kenotic emptying, is not the same as the intermundane experiences of contingency, rather, they are the presupposition of those experiences; the archetype to the image.³³⁷ In the drama of the Trinity, “everything temporal takes place within that embrace.”³³⁸

Thus, in Balthasar’s divinity, there is an ever-ongoing exchange of utter and complete self-giving to each other, not just as perichoretic interpenetration, but as separation and “letting-be,” which allows for true mutuality. Thus, God is love—those very movements of self-donations define each person. This transcendently free act,³³⁹ leads each of the persons to “surprise and surpass” the other in gift, in an ever-greater

³³⁴ *TD II*, 259.

³³⁵ *TD IV*, 324.

³³⁶ *TL II*, 156; *TL III*, 74.

³³⁷ *TD IV*, 324.

³³⁸ Thus, for Balthasar, the divine persons are such: The Father is the one relating in mutual self-donation to Son and Spirit, who share their reciprocal relationship back with him and to each other. Their identity is nothing but this love. Thus, they are not so unified as to be a monad, nor diverse to be a tritheism: they are found in their relationship, that is, pure love of selflessness—identical with the concept of procession, so as the person to be precisely that pure act. The divine essence is not a “blank, homogenous block of identity”, but a giving, receiving, and gift in the Father, Son and Spirit, which is then distantly imaged in the “fluidity and transitional quality” of creatures. Thus, in this analogy, both divine and human are only themselves insofar as they “go beyond themselves and indicate their primal ground and their vocation of self-surrender.” Hans Urs Von Balthasar, “On the Concept of Person,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 13 (Spring, 1986), 25-26; *TD*, 327; *TD V*, 76.

³³⁹ Though not “free” in an arbitrary sense—it appears that the divine nature and will work in co-agreement, by “natural and necessary will,” in the persons. *TD V*, 88.

heightening of exuberant love given, received, and returned, each themselves insofar as they allow the others to be; the divine is the “supra-relationship” itself.³⁴⁰ It is within this giving that all creation is found in divine archetype, “able to contain and embrace all the other distances that are possible within the world”: all change, all suffering, all passions, all succession, all becoming, and even all being, as well. It is within this primordial archetype of self-donation that Balthasar finds his answer for the entirety of contingent creation and divine necessity.³⁴¹ This eternal action of the Trinity is what he refers to as “the First Kenosis”—when the Father, as he ever and always does, hands himself over totally to the Son, through the Spirit, emptying himself utterly in order to be given unto the Son who, in return, receives his love joyfully and, with great humility, returns it back utterly to the Father in total obedience through the Spirit, and so enlivens the Father with his gift. This is “total surrender” as part of the bliss of “absolute freedom”; the freedom of the Father to want to give, the freedom of the Son to want to receive, and the freedom of the Spirit to be exchange and exultation.³⁴² Total union achieved through total distance—the Trinity not only as interpenetration, but as “letting-be.” This “letting-be” kenosis is selfsame with love, selfsame with the transcendentals, and selfsame with the divine nature itself.³⁴³ “God is love and nothing else.”³⁴⁴ Therefore, their inter-given divine nature is of ever-new surprise, ever-new goodness; over-flowing gratuity and

³⁴⁰ We call this Holiness—“the absolute being shining forth in it's limitless self-affirmation and freedom.” *TD V*, 89.

³⁴¹ “Such an incomprehensible and unique separation of God from himself that it includes and grounds every other separation, be it never so dark and bitter.” *TD IV*, 323-325.

³⁴² *Drama II*, 257.

³⁴³ *TL II*, 177-178.

³⁴⁴ Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 93.

overtaking delight that can never be plumbed.³⁴⁵ The divine nature is not shared among the hypostatic persons as an “untouchable treasure,” but rather it is “what is possessed and given away,” in blissful equity, as the “fullness of blessedness lies in both giving and receiving.”³⁴⁶ Indeed, it could be rightly said that “Being is equal to giving.”³⁴⁷

At first glance, both the Process and Classical theologians might chasten Balthasar for being too much their opposite, indeed, Balthasar recognizes that to speak in such ways is to “walk on a knife’s edge.” Yet, his goal is to avoid trite and mythic discussion of an experiencing God (especially in the experience of his *analogia entis*), while yet also making the experience of Christ normative of the divine.³⁴⁸ Balthasar thus insists that the divine is utterly transcendent, in need of nothing, yet that transcendence is, itself, an eternal experience of giving oneself-away which being the infinite act, precludes and includes every possible finite and imminent act in itself. Balthasar affirms this by the *analogia entis*: “it is only on the basis of the economic Trinity that we have knowledge of the imminent Trinity and dare to make statements about it.”³⁴⁹ In this way, Balthasar charts a path between a process theology that loses God amidst the world, or the super-human mythological God, which thus will loses his transcendental being, and the classical theologies of immutability and impassible, under whose interpretation the

³⁴⁵ “Despite his omniscience, God loves in such a way that he always lets himself be surpassed and surprised by the Beloved, since the central thing in eternal fellowship is love, which even knowledge serves.” *TL III*, 227.

³⁴⁶ *TD II*, 258.

³⁴⁷ *GL V*, 391.

³⁴⁸ Balthasar also conceives of Trinity as Author (Father), Actor (Son), and Director (Spirit). No image can be utterly comprehensive, but Christ “demands” that which is prohibited by negative and philosophical theology: a way to fathom the unfathomable experiences of God. *TD IV*, 324. Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 29-30.

³⁴⁹ This distinguishes Balthasar from Rahner, who did not recognize the drama, as he conflated too closely the economic and imminent Trinity (O’Hanlon, 37). For Balthasar, “the economic Trinity is the unavoidable locus for all understandings of the immanent Trinity and that the immanent Trinity always lies as the formal ground of economic possibilities”; a similarity within an ever-greater dissimilarity, mediated by the *analogia entis*. *TD II*, 118-119; *TD III*, 508; *TD IV*, 322-323. Henderson, 58.

human role of Jesus is often diminished and a monadic stoicism, often artificially restricts the dynamic inner life of the God and his possible engagement with the world.³⁵⁰ Thus, for Balthasar, the divine is not a static lake, nor a listless ocean, but an unsourced wellspring, a fountain, immutably moving and impassibly replenishing itself, even as the world lives by its excess spray.³⁵¹ It is here that “all earthly becoming is a reflection of the eternal happening in God.”³⁵² But what does this look like? Can such a middle way be, keeping transcendence and imminence in tension, while remaining true to Balthasar’s transcendental method and Christocentrism?³⁵³ Let us take up the test cases from chapter one to fill out the picture of Balthasar’s solution.

3.2: The All-in-Christ Creation, The Second Kenosis

The first note of creation, for Balthasar, is played thusly: “God did not create the world by turning outward, but by turning to the Son.”³⁵⁴ Everything of creation occurs between the relationship of the Father and Son through the Spirit, not external to God’s being, but within the very heart of it. It is therefore within the Trinitarian relationship that all problems of relating divine and contingent freedom, the infinite and eternal with the finite and temporal, and relational suffering are resolved without the divine dissolving into the world, or the world into the divine.³⁵⁵ It is in creation that God performs the

³⁵⁰ It is here that Balthasar believes Thomas and Augustine went most wrong: by making the divine essence intellect or reason, functionally, rather than the relationality of a communal Trinity, which kept the divine far more separate from the world than love can make possible. Henderson, 58; O’Donnell, 207.

³⁵¹ For Balthasar, the processions are self-same with the Trinitarian act. It implies no ontological, nor even necessarily logical, pre-eminence. The most important thing such a term denotes is the divine “constant vitality,” combining Thomas’ conception of divine essence as relation and act with Bulgakov’s insistence that relational act is kenotic love. *GL I*, 616; *GL IV*, 289; *TD V*, 77-78; Nichols, *Word Abroad*, 140.

³⁵² *TD V*, 67.

³⁵³ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 191.

³⁵⁴ Thus: “through and for him” (Col 1:16, John 1:4). O’Hanlon, 56; *TD V*, 247.

³⁵⁵ Humanity intuitively recognizes this truth: the limited finitude of their own self-being, versus the “unlimited communicability of being at large.” *GL V*, 615; *TL I*, 46. Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 67-68.

Second Kenosis, continuing the first, by giving himself up in total self-donation to the Other—in this case, the world.³⁵⁶ In the one freedom possessed equally by the divine persons, their unity of will and integrated intention to act creates creaturely freedom as an “irrevocable gift,” binding their own freedom by founding another pole of freedom,³⁵⁷ forged in the image of their own prototypical freedom, to allow each and every being to have an “unfathomable distinctness.”³⁵⁸ These freedoms, once created, must decide whether to return to their source, just as in the Son “a genuine oppositions of freedoms is possible.”³⁵⁹ The infinite “letting-be” demands such possibility, just as it already exists perfectly in the godhead. Indeed, it is a comparatively little matter to have finite freedom opposite the inherent freedom of infinitude; if infinite freedom can find itself undissolved into infinite, the finite will certainly not be lost.³⁶⁰ Even when that creaturely freedom goes terribly, horribly, wrong, even then, God is faithful to respecting and giving to the Other.³⁶¹ In a unique way, the divine is large enough that nothing can be lost within him. His entire being is centered around the free “letting-be” of the Other. There can be created poles of freedom only because there are uncreated poles of freedom already giving and receiving the divine life. Far from an opposite, the relationship between imaged finite and archetypal infinite freedoms manifest the life of God itself, giving himself away in total abandonment to the Other, in absolute freedom. His free power is found in powerlessness, beyond necessity to dominate.³⁶² Only here, in this carved-out

³⁵⁶ *TD II*, 194.

³⁵⁷ *TD IV*, 328.

³⁵⁸ *TD V*, 485-486.

³⁵⁹ “But it shall find, if it attempts to stand on its own, that it was never standing alone to begin with; that it was always gift and to contravene the gifted nature of free being is to invite destabilized collapsed.” *TD II*, 190.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 259.

³⁶¹ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 194-195.

³⁶² *TD IV*, 331.

space within the intra-trinitarian distance, can God's engagement with creatureliness be played out. The divine is irreversibly engaged to write with the "hieroglyphs of human destiny."³⁶³

Balthasar retains that the divide between the divine and eternal infinitude of God is an immeasurable distance from the mortal and temporal finitude of God, keeping Process at bay by accepting the Classical maxim. But whereas the Classicalists attempted to bridge the distance by emanations from the divine level to the human, or by stop-gaps that allowed the divine distant relationship, Balthasar insists those are not true relationship. The divide between creator and creation, immense as it may be, is dwarfed by the infinite distance between the Father and Son; their great "letting-be" that allows their dance to be a free outburst rather than a choreographed dirge. In the same way, the eternal swallows up the temporal. The mode of the former is *depth*, while the mode of the latter is *lateral*; its stretch can never outrun, go further, nor have succession that runs beyond the depth of being that is the divine.³⁶⁴ God's nature "throws a bridge across the abiding abyss of the major *dissimilitudo*," born from a plentitude that "can never be exhausted" within the divine identity. Other-ness already eternally exists, and it is in that image all other Other-ness is created.³⁶⁵ This is the key, for Balthasar: the world does not

³⁶³ One must ask, then, why? So asks Process and Classical theologians alike: why create the world if God is not necessarily tied to it or absolutely distant? What purpose is there in creating an image when you have, already, the archetype? Who cares for an imitation *Mona Lisa* if you possess the real one? This, in a sense, is the ultimate question—and it shall be answered herein as it is in Balthasar: at the end.

³⁶⁴ Perhaps this is not so different from those moments we experience and call timeless, whether for the joy which caused them to speed by, or the wonder that slowed time down: either way, time vanishes in the depths of experience called eternity; a fullness and liveliness contra time's striving and restlessness. Thus, eternity "is not the negation of time and space but the unimaginable and superabundance of times and spaces in which ... the fullness of life that is eternally going on in God [is expressed]." *TD II*, 279; *TD V*, 77-78.

³⁶⁵ *TL II*, 181.

stand in opposition to God, nor is it so different as the Classicists have supposed it was.³⁶⁶ Creatureliness was made in, through, and for the Son and so, whether in his image of Other-ness or in the inherent presence of the divine-pointing transcendentals of being, creatureliness is the finite form of the infinite, with which God relates in a way similar to how he “supra-relates” to himself.³⁶⁷ By being archetype and image, there is an inherent relationship born into the very nature of existence. God knows the world from the inside, and worldly being is “destined to be harbored in the divine being.”³⁶⁸ Worldly time is in God’s eternity, worldly space is within the infinite space, and worldly becoming is in the eternal eventfulness of the life of divine self-giving: active, moving, and receiving, love. The divine gratuity, the other awakening her child to the gift of being, can thus create unthreatening finitudes, which in their very finitude and receptivity of being, reflect his own unsurpassable fullness *and* poverty.³⁶⁹ Thus, while clearly distinct and undissolved, all worldly things are found “ever-greater” in the divine, who is not in required process or mythologically super-human, nor classically immutable and impassible.³⁷⁰

Lastly, thus, divine-creaturely relationship is real for both: a revelatory gift from

³⁶⁶ But nor is it as similar as Process theology would have it—the world is alike to God in ascending analogy; as archetype and image, not of the same substance whatsoever.

³⁶⁷ “Being itself here unveils its final countenance, which for us receives the name of trinitarian love; only with this final mystery does light fall at last on that other mystery: Why there is Being at all and why it enters our horizon as light and truth and goodness and beauty.” *GL I*, 158; *TL II*, 184.

³⁶⁸ This exists in an “ever-greater” dissimilitude in which the analogical mode is meaningful, it must always be recalled that it ever-exceeds its likeness—time and eternity; human love and divine love; even relationship and persons are ever greater than our idea of relationships and persons. *TL II*, 137; Schindler, 95.

³⁶⁹ “However, what the creature receives through God as wealth is simultaneously divine absolute poverty, implying that the creature can never surpass God, for he cannot overcome the distinction between fullness and poverty in his own finitude. But in so far as this divine poverty is what defines God as ever-greater richness, the poverty of the creature is itself a positive reflection of divine being...difference between God and creature is not compromised by the similarity between the two, but is rather, paradoxically, increased in an ever-greater fashion.” *GL V*, 625-627.

³⁷⁰ God supra-experiences, supra-suffers and supra-emotes in analogical archetype. *TD II*, 9, 118-119; *TL II*, 84.

the Creator's side and a participatory and sacramental gift from the Creature's in the "exteriorization" of what the divine eternally is.³⁷¹ If creaturely freedom is truly real to the freely self-limited divine,³⁷² if eternity can encapsulate time and be its origin and prototype, if God already experiences the primal and archetypal suffering of giving himself away entirely to the Son, then it is right and proper that, when God turns inward to creation, he can engage with fidelity, mercy, and willingness to suffer that comes with mutual relationship; his eternal relationality always included this possibility.³⁷³ Balthasar uses Lukan language to refer to the "very bowels" of God being moved by his commitment to the creation; he is not the untouchable of Neoplatonism.³⁷⁴ He can be *pro nobis* precisely because of his liveliness of being in the perpetuity of eternity, co-experiencing the relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit. Even when the creature does not respond in likeness to the Son, even this corruption may be taken up into God and its suffering made meaningful from its participation.³⁷⁵ Thus, the Biblical anthropopathisms are not inaccurate descriptions to be tossed away, but the relational descriptors of the possibilities of God's infinite freedom, able to give-up of himself so much as to really experience the pangs of relationship with a people.³⁷⁶ This is not, however, to say that

³⁷¹ Balthasar seeks to maintain that God is essentially immutable, in so far as whatever kenosis he undergoes is already grounded in the eternal, unchanging condition of his love, even as he ascribes God a limitless freedom that allows him to undergo change and to act and express himself in kenosis *MP*, 29; *TD II*, 284. *TD II*, 284.

³⁷² From Abraham (Gen 18: 16-33), to Israel (Exod 32: 14), to mankind (Gen 6:6-7), and the resultant emotive consequences (Isa 54:8; Ps 30:5; Hos 11:8; Jer 31 :20; Jon 3: 10), Balthasar insists with Heschel that God is "moved and affected" in his relationship with the world and that he allows himself to be "involved, even stirred by the conduct and fate of man..." Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 4-6.

³⁷³ O'Hanlon, 39.

³⁷⁴ *TL II*, 143.

³⁷⁵ *TD II*, 120.

³⁷⁶ *TL II*, 144-145.

what God experiences in “anger,” “repentance,” “suffering,” or even “surprise”³⁷⁷ is precisely the same as human experience. After all, our experience is of an inconceivable proportion to his. Nothing in these experiences create necessity in God, entangling him in some hellish mode, for they all originated in his archetype.³⁷⁸ In a sense, the language of human experience, the “ontological language of creatureliness as such” is one known personally to God, not because he is bound by its necessity as we are, rather, “it could be likened to a dialect of the standard language spoken by pure form in God.”³⁷⁹ It is with this simile that we should close, for it sums up everything Balthasarian about God’s relationship with the world: he engages in the isolated and specialized dialect, not to be bound by it (God plus the world is not greater than God alone), but because he knows the infinitely more pure language, which was the original archetype of the creaturely dialect in complete purity and wholeness.³⁸⁰ Yet, even this is not enough for the divine, as self-donating love demands to exteriorize itself as far as is possible.

³⁷⁷ Such possibilities are necessary, as “characteristic of genuine love that cannot tire of looking at the Beloved. That’s the Son in the Father’s presence as ever be holding him in a new way...so we can say that if human love is enlivened by the element of surprise, something analogous to it cannot be excluded from the divine love. It is as if the Son born of the Father from the outset surpasses the Father’s wildest expectations...The vitality and freedom of eternal love in the realm of divine being constitutes the prototype for what love can be, at its best, in the realm of creaturely existence and development.” *TD V*, 79-80.

³⁷⁸ Said another way: anger, or compassion, or mercy, *needs God*. *TD II*, 118; *TD IV*, 330-331.

³⁷⁹ Balthasar is always careful to remind that the dissimilitude of creature and creator is, while analogous, yet insurmountable by mortal effort alone. Indeed, without this ever-greater dissimilitude, creaturely freedom could not participate in divine life. An act of love, for Balthasar, necessarily entails some sort of self-surrender from the I to a true Thou, a true Other—only a “truly-Other” divinity, Trinity it itself, could ever be “true Other” to both itself and the world. *GL IV*, 406-407; *TL II*, 84, 180.

³⁸⁰ Thus, immutability and impassibility must be redefined to refer to the unchanging-ness of the self-donating essence of God, which then includes within all the mutable and passible possibilities of love. O’Hanlon, 55-56.

3.3: The Utter Incarnation: the Third Kenosis

In light of both the primal and creational kenosis, it is natural to perceive whence the next step will lead—full incarnation of the deity *into* creation. It may be likened to an hourglass:³⁸¹ the two vessels, divine and mortal, meet in a single, narrow passage named Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word and Son. No other point of meeting exists, and the sand only ever flows from above to below, but it really does move, causing increase in one as the other is emptied.³⁸² The surrendering required to take on flesh and becoming must all be referred back to the very nature of God to give himself away, without constriction, in total kenotic self-donation as he does ever-always to the Son.³⁸³ Indeed, it is the identity of the Son that remains continuously divine. His very nature in being begotten is to be *sent*, and this is made manifest most fully in being sent as man into humanity, wherein the *mission* of Christ—being sent by the Father in an eternal mode of recipient obedience to accomplish his kenotic purpose—is self-same with his eternal identity. This makes the experience of the Son, the Word, coherent: enfleshed or in spirit, he is the exhaustive mission of the divine.³⁸⁴ The divine is not “in the first place, absolute power, but absolute love,” and thus his being is found in giving himself away—even so far as the exteriorization in the incarnational self-gift, which includes “its ontic condition of

³⁸¹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 194.

³⁸² God is intensely imminent precisely because, in his transcendence, he is imminent to himself in the persons.

³⁸³ *GL V*, 213.

³⁸⁴ Balthasar founds this in the NT “sending/receiving” language—“The Father “is the one who sends” (John 3:17; 6:39; Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4), and the Son’s own knowledge of himself coincides with his knowledge “of his being sent” (John 5:36; 6:29; 6:57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:8-25). Both the sending of the Father and the identity of the Son are related primordially to the relationship between Father and Son “in the beginning” (John 1: 1, 18). But the human life that Jesus derives from this...is not artificially contrived but is one actively and freely sought in the historical enactment of the Father’s mission (John 3:34; 4:34; 5:30; 5:19; 6:38; 9:4; 12:49). Here the elliptical style...emerges because Jesus delivers the divine mission of the Father...his entire identity is oriented not towards his own ends but to a continuous ‘returning’ to the Father” (John 7:33; 12:45, 16:5).” *TD III*, 156.

possibility in the eternal exteriorization.”³⁸⁵ In in this way, the Son merely continues his *being by becoming*; by giving up of himself in obedience and reception to become human, he is actually being truest to his divine being, experiencing temporally what he had always known in eternity.³⁸⁶ He remains, as the continuous Son, God’s “ultimate secret given away...without remainder.”³⁸⁷ Like a particular horizon or a narrow ravine, the flow of his obedience and reception of the Father’s love and will is restricted to the present mission, selfsame with his identity.³⁸⁸ This mission is, of course, of love, reconciliation and reunion, full of prodigality and lavish self-gift, accomplished by the *analogia entis*.³⁸⁹ Only he can accomplish it, for only he is the “ever-more” of the divine archetype *vis a vis* the creaturely image, and by participating in creatureliness, bring such into the participation of divine life,³⁹⁰ “not simply ... from above...[but] using his humanity, body and soul, as the unit of measurement.”³⁹¹ Thus, Jesus Christ can “be” and “become,” for he was ever *being* and *becoming* in the divine archetype of passively receiving and actively returning the Father’s self-donation. Thus, becoming human is the exteriorized manifestation of a story already eternity-long, of the archetype

³⁸⁵ *MP*, 28.

³⁸⁶ *TD IV*, 157-159.

³⁸⁷ *TD II*, 148-149.

³⁸⁸ “The inspiration of the artist would give us a better view who is never more free than when, no longer hesitating between artistic possibilities, he is possessed by a true idea that presents itself to him and finite form and follows it Sovereign commands.” *TD III*, 196-197.

³⁸⁹ “Christology from below” knows only “the one sent”: the divine imprint and expositor. *GL VII*, 146; *TD III*, 156.

³⁹⁰ “We begin to discern the meaning of Fatherhood in the eternal realm when we consider the Son’s task, which is to reveal this Father’s Love, such Fatherhood can only mean the giving away of everything the Father is, including his entire godhead, for He has nothing apart from what He is, it is a giving-away that, in the Father’s Act of generation, which lasts for all eternity, leaves the latter’s womb empty. In God, poverty and wealth are one and the same.” In this way, Christ measures the distance between the finite and infinite without collapsing the two. *TD III*, 63, 124, 257-259, 518-519; Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 68.

³⁹¹ “Perhaps more *analogia caritatis* than *entis*,” (Kim, 118, 253). Indeed, being is properly interpreted as love, both the unity of the three transcendentals, concretized in Jesus Christ. *TD III*, 221; *TD IV*, 324.

condescending to the image: hence, Theo-Drama.³⁹²

In this way, for Balthasar, there is no mythical or necessary creaturely process in the divine life, but yet, there is a “becoming” within which “language breaks down...that truly touches the divine.”³⁹³ The eternal play now occurs upon a new stage, which Christ enacts freshly as a very particular man, “by entering in contact with the world’s theater, the good which takes place in God’s action is affected by the world’s ambiguity.”³⁹⁴ Thus, when it comes to the Chalcedonian natures of Christ, Balthasar would much rather highlight Maximus and speak of the “succession of different phases in the continuity of the one drama.”³⁹⁵ This is far more a two-state Christology than two-nature, founded particularly on the successive language of Philippians 2. In doing so, Balthasar does not reject Chalcedon, but understands himself as avoiding the Nestorian disjunction by presenting how the two natures occur—by the Son surrendering “the form of God” to take up an expressive and obedient form of creature, still united to God in the sending through the Spirit.³⁹⁶ God is not united with his opposite through a necessary stop-gap, as most Classicists end up presenting, rather, he condenses his archetype to live as if an image.³⁹⁷ But because of the continuity of creation from divinity, be it ever so long, it is within the nature of the divine to be so united. Indeed, it was a decision made from eternity even as the Son received and returned the Father’s total kenosis; the lamb is

³⁹² Hence, Balthasar describes his theology as walking a “knife-edge between Nestorianism and Monophysitism,” without prioritizing being (neo-Thomism) or becoming (Protestant liberalism), as each one wrongly emphasizes either Christ’s divinity or humanity at the cost of the other. *TD III*, 221, 519-520; *TD IV*, 324; Henderson, 26-27.

³⁹³ O’Hanlon, 21; *TD II*, 224, 260-275; *TD III*, 240, 245, 253-257; *MP*, 28-30, 110.

³⁹⁴ A drama “Conceived and produced and acted all in one.” McIntosh, 52; O’Hanlon, 21-22; *TD I*, 19.

³⁹⁵ *GL V*, 212.

³⁹⁶ O’Hanlon, 44.

³⁹⁷ “Perhaps, tentatively and insecurely, when the Creator first made man the ideal image He had in mind was the Incarnate Son as Redeemer—such disclosure was always the goal.” *MP*, 30. Rev 13:8.

“slain before the creation of the world” because the Son had ever-and-always made the choice to obey and receive the donation of the Father, his will, love, and his mission, with his whole being, even if, “in the form of a Servant,” he must be condensed.³⁹⁸ In this way, Jesus is full-humanity elevated to the divine mode, the image made to nearly-explode with the identity of the archetype.³⁹⁹ All that was necessary for Jesus to be fully divine was that he recognize his mission, sensitive to his filial existence as love, even as an identity of which he “grew” (in the servant state) into the full realization, by a minute-by-minute obedience through the Spirit to the will of his Father in that moment.⁴⁰⁰ This finite mode of kenotic divine existence could only exist because it already existed in archetype in the infinite primal kenosis, which is, itself, the nature of the trinitarian relationships, which in turn is the identity of the divine.⁴⁰¹ Christ is the highest expression of both God and man: entirely God in remaining the being and revelation of receptive Son of the Father’s self-donating love, and entirely man, as human nature was meant always to receive relational fullness from the Father, rather than it’s “shrunk self pre-occupation.”⁴⁰² Because of this continuous, singular identity, one cannot, with the Classicists, split any part of Christ into the one who exercised the mission and one who

³⁹⁸ Obedience is not rote servitude, for love “transforms every obligation into a choice and every external desire of the beloved becomes the interior desire of the lover... loves desire to place its own freedom in the hands of a beloved as a kind of trophy of love a token of aspiration.” Freedom is inherent to the receptive obedience of the Son—the selfsame nature and will with the Father (*McIntosh*, 78). Christ’s emptying “takes the continuity of divine being into a radical new direction that, at first glance, might appear as discontinuity.” *TD I*, 19; *TD III*, 200.

³⁹⁹ Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 26-29.

⁴⁰⁰ This, then, is the role of the Spirit: bringing the Father’s will to the incarnate son in ever new ways and with ever greater clarity—“even though he already has this will within him in the form of a readiness to obey.” *TD III*, 510. What is required to keep Jesus’ personal identity as the Son is not a “mastery of all metaphysical detail, but simply that his life be marked by the continually unfolding awareness of how to be the son of Father...that I am the one through whom the Kingdom of God must and will come.” *TD III*, 160, 169, 179, 227-228; *McIntosh*, 60.

⁴⁰¹ Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 113.

⁴⁰² *GL V*, 126; *TD IV*, 317; Henderson, 42-43; *McIntosh*, 67; O’Hanlon, 44.

remained unaffected and stoic, as if the hypostatic union is of names only or that God's infinitude isn't large enough to include creaturely experience.⁴⁰³ For Balthasar, Jesus Christ was the "eternal son dwelling in time," experiencing all its frustrations, pains, joys, and growths, while, in the same action, maintaining the needful divine being, like the harmonic pedal note under a feud. His missional identity, receiving everything from the Father and returning it in obedience, continues to unfold the eternal divine love.⁴⁰⁴ Because of this, the Son must be obedient and receptive to the mission of love, all the way to its end, that his full self might be entirely exteriorized and offered back to the Father: "to speak of the incarnation is to speak of the cross."⁴⁰⁵

3.4: Crucifixion as the Penultimate Step

"What is crude, what is explicitly ugly, what is painful to the point of meaninglessness, the experience of being handed over to what is vulgar and humiliating, can appear as assimilated into a totality which can and must be accepted positively."⁴⁰⁶ Thus, for Balthasar, everything builds to this moment—the entire momentum of the incarnated life was directed toward this "hour." The mission of Christ's identity was always aimed here. In this moment, the divine takes a step that is "entirely different in quality" for in crucifixion, there is an "inner appropriation of what is ungodly

⁴⁰³ "The solution of the riddle of human existence was in the possibility, in the God-man, of God sharing man's suffering, indeed of his suffering *for* man. All meaning hangs on the fact that, in Jesus, the God who cannot suffer is able to experience death and futility, without ceasing to be himself." *TD II*, 120.

⁴⁰⁴ "The task given him by his father, that is, of expressing God the Father through his entire being, through his life and death...totally occupies his self-consciousness and fills it to the very brim...there is neither room nor time for any detached reflection of the "who am I" kind...so far as he fully embraces that mission, he is *comprehensor*, but the mission itself strays upon a path in which he is also *vitiator*." Balthasar, *Engagement with God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 44; *TD III*, 228.

⁴⁰⁵ *GL V*, 212.

⁴⁰⁶ *GL IV*, 29.

and hostile to God...an identification with the darkness of alienation from God."⁴⁰⁷

Indeed, in his death, Christ cries earnestly that he has been abandoned by God—for mysteriously, he has been. This death is not just experienced in the humanity of Christ, but in the trinitarian mission, as death is brought into its opposite, the divine life.⁴⁰⁸ God is confronted by himself as the Son takes up his lot entirely with his opposite: sin. In taking up the human burden, the Son takes up their wrathful separation, as well. So far does the Son's loving and receptive obedience to the Father go that he takes up even the cup of wrath, as well, and in that great distance already eternally between Father and Son. The total impoverishment of divine emptying occurs so the Son "can be utterly and completely determined by the will of the father, who loads on him the burden of the reality," allowing the burden of sin's rejection to coincide with he who has never rejected the Father, issuing in its condemnation and death in light of His love.⁴⁰⁹ Thus, in taking in all that is most destructive and evil in creation, it may be redeemed by making it all a part of the continuity of the relationship amongst the Trinity that has defined every movement and experience thus far.⁴¹⁰ This is the ultimate exteriorization of the Trinitarian kenosis, as the Son proves whether the Trinitarian relationship can overcome its opposite.⁴¹¹

Indeed, this discontinuous experience, in its incoherence, does not entirely lack

⁴⁰⁷ *TD IV*, 334.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 335.

⁴⁰⁹ *GL V*, 208-209; *MP*, 119.

⁴¹⁰ It would be quite apart from the present purpose to engage with Balthasar's soteriology at any depth. But in brief essence, Christ's substitutionary work expropriated humanity into himself and thus effected reconciliation, that is, the liberation from sin, the effect of spiritual fruit, and being drawn into the Trinitarian life itself. As both priest and victim, Jesus, in "mysterious willing and loving," concentrated all opposition to God in himself, and suffered in himself, for all, the inevitable abandonment by God—this "touches the heart of the Father more deeply than the sin of the world does." O'Hanlon, 32-33; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 163-165.

⁴¹¹ Quoting Bulgakov, Balthasar writes, "the Cross of Christ is inscribed in the creation of the world since its basis was laid." *TD V*, 508; *MP*, 35.

continuity. The Son's suffering is made possible by his mortal wounds which are "eternally open," for they represent the continuity of the possibility for "supra-suffering" within the divine exchange.⁴¹² The coherence resides precisely in its opposite: even in wrathful alienation of experiencing the opposite of his nature, the Son is united in "common word" with the love of the Father.⁴¹³ The moment of crucifixion is, then, the moment of both terror and glory; of humiliation and exaltation, as the "highest dramatic quality" is reached when God is both as far from, and as close, to Godself as can be.⁴¹⁴ The "entire act of judgment remains contained within the love of the Father [and Son/Spirit]...within the brackets of this love lies the whole momentum of the curse of sin of the world."⁴¹⁵ Precisely because going unto death as sinner is for God to reach as far as can be, it is then that his heart is "broken open" and the last, superabundant realities of God's revelation in the Son, the last truths of his loving self-donation, are poured out for all to see.⁴¹⁶ The eternal self-donation of God's love, and the eternal receptive obedience of the Son, reach their earthly crescendo most clearly when, out of love for the lost world, they submit to join in its doom.⁴¹⁷ The most extreme suffering in the divine is, in fact, the "epiphany of their highest unity"; the abandoned cry become "the loftiest knowledge of God" as the Son is obedient unto the furthest point, and thus reveals the totality of the

⁴¹² *TD IV*, 334.

⁴¹³ *Ibid*, 348-249; *MP*, 51-54.

⁴¹⁴ This is the absolute rejection of reality's nature as self-donation, bringing the drama's tension to its height. *TD IV*, 364; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 139-140.

⁴¹⁵ *GL V*, 225.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*, 86; *MP*, 34.

⁴¹⁷ For Balthasar, the Augustinian strand in Western thought had resulted in theologies guilty of "endless discussion and distinctions" regarding the triumph of Christ but are unable to speak of "any genuine divine involvement in the passion." A nominal link is, too often, all that remains: "The experiences of the two natures, in this tradition, are so contradictory as to be irreconcilable." *MP*, 147, 169-170; *GL V*, 207.

Trinitarian self-giving.⁴¹⁸ Death does truly enter the divine, for Jesus is fully divine-as-human, but it does not destroy God, rather, it reveals him for the eternal-giving that he always has been. The suffering of giving himself away unto death and self-separation does not change God precisely because the nature of divinity is to have eternally been dying a “supra-death” of giving itself away over the infinite, primal separation of Father and Son. Even death is precluded in eternity, as the result of the Father’s sovereign freedom to give himself utterly to the Son in love and have himself returned.⁴¹⁹ The third kenosis, which has really only been the unfolding of the first, has reached its complete exteriorization,⁴²⁰ overcoming all opposites from within, for the creational logic has been overcome by the logic of the Trinity in which it has eternally rested.⁴²¹

3.5: The Hiatus as Completion

But for Balthasar, the first kenosis, born of God’s freedom-in-love and made exterior and concrete in the form of the *analogia entis*, has one more depth to which it must stoop. Balthasar’s intense friendship with Adrienne von Speyr here comes to the forefront, as much of her mystical experiences were alleged participations with Christ in the grave, or hell. Led by her, Balthasar describes this state unlike the Patristics or most of church history, wherein Christ was the triumphant victor coming to proclaim his success and rescue the captives—rather, the experience of death is a “nowhere,” a “formlessness, second chaos,” the knowledge of “having lost God forever,” “the absence

⁴¹⁸ “One must allow an ‘event’ into God...described in the words ‘emptying’ and humiliation ... [and] consists in abandoning equality with God.” *MP*, 23-24; McIntosh, 66; *GL V*, 207, *TD V*, 259-262; Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 121.

⁴¹⁹ For “Only in relation to death do we decide the overall bearing of our lives.” Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 219. Henderson, 63. *TD V*, 237-238.

⁴²⁰ *GL VII*, 213-214; *TD IV*, 328-332; *MP*, 35.

⁴²¹ O’Hanlon, 34-35; Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 122-123.

of faith, hope and love.”⁴²² In hell, Christ is no mythological lord, rather, he is in “full solidarity” with the dead, in their bottomless condition; a full acceptance of *all* human experience, unto the very end.⁴²³ It is in the grave that Christ experiences the lowest of human being, even non-being, having amassed all sin and brought it into the silence of the grave.⁴²⁴ Here, Christ knows personally the “burning void” of the hollow created by the divine absence; the lack of love once intimately known. He is “smothered, starved, stranger to yourself,” in the aimless and loveless chaos of sin.⁴²⁵ Even this “alienated space between humanity and God” must be visited and “plotted once more within the space between the Father and Son.”⁴²⁶ Even when “there is nothing to be said about God,” there is divine declaration,⁴²⁷ for God is found in the absence of giving-away.⁴²⁸ “The light itself...no longer understands itself within the darkness,” yet, that, “it still shines is it's irrevocable obedience to the Paternal sun”.⁴²⁹

Precisely because this state is the “lowest rung,” it is where Christ must go and finally experience the loss of relationship with the divine, in order that he might complete the obedience to the divine mission of redemption and love that is his very role and identity and person.⁴³⁰ Fulfilling to the end his divine mission and eternal identity, exteriorizing the divine even to the last in death, Christ’s “vision of chaos becomes for us

⁴²² Balthasar, *A First Glance at Adrienne Von Speyr* trans. Antje Lawry & Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 66-67; McIntosh, 110.

⁴²³ Ibid, 111.

⁴²⁴ Ibid, 115-116.

⁴²⁵ Ibid, 113. “Existence without strength, without activity, without enjoyment, without knowledge of what takes place on Earth, without praise of God, without return and existence—nothingness and oblivion.” *GL V*, 229.

⁴²⁶ Mark McIntosh, “Christology” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 186.

⁴²⁷ Rowan Williams, “Balthasar and Trinity” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, 37.

⁴²⁸ The persons do not hold their divinity like “some possession, precious, inalienable, all [their] own,” rather, Christ reveals a free divinity...Son exposes a Father “who does not believe it necessary to ‘hold on’ to this Son, but ‘delivers him over’” (John 3:16; 6:32; 19:11; Rom 4:25; 8:32; Ph 2:6-8) *MP*, 28.

⁴²⁹ Balthasar, *Life Out of Death* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 40.

⁴³⁰ *MP*, 164.

the condition of our vision of the divinity.” And, thus, he remains utterly himself, even in his opposite.⁴³¹ Indeed, only the one who has eternally been the recipient and returner of the Father’s divine self-donation could go to this “absolute passivity of being dead.”⁴³² Precisely because this is still within Jesus’ identity, precisely because it is still within the divine self-donation, and thus, within the divine identity, it can truly be said that the proclamation of God’s identity, the Gospel, has been made.⁴³³ Thus, Christ experiences the lot of man and legitimizes his redemptive mission, expressing the self-donation of the Trinitarian nature to its deepest and most painful depths.⁴³⁴ The Kenotic bond of the Trinity is stretched to its economic limit and proven true; the primordial distance of Father and Son, over which the eternal self-donation takes place, is enough to encompass even the total death of the Son which is transferred into it and swallowed up.⁴³⁵ The Spirit “vouchsafes” as the same bond of an alienated relationship, for such Other-ness is inherent, even defined, within the divine life itself.⁴³⁶ Every part of being now is used “for the exposition of God,”⁴³⁷ as the Son’s “yes” to the Father continues to the very end,

⁴³¹ *MP*, 175-176.

⁴³² *GL V*, 230; *MP*, 151, 157.

⁴³³ Indeed, in pre-eminent way, only Christ has experienced hell, abandoned by the Father in such a unique way, and so making the “whole fruit of the redeeming cross seen together.” Christ’s death “sets the limits to the extension of damnation.” *MP*, 166; *GL V*, 230; O’Hanlon, 26.

⁴³⁴ As he quotes, “The self-consumption of evil can no longer do anything more than consume itself eternally like a flame that is darkly self-enclosed...to engulf forever in the empty abyss the final burnt-out relics of all that can be burned.” *MP*, 173-174; *GL V*, 233-235; *TD III*, 529-534.

⁴³⁵ This, of course, represents Balthasar’s intense interest to transcend philosophical categories, like Barth, by the Christological elevation to methodological essence. Like Barth, Balthasar refuses a God’s whose freedom can be contained in the Aristotelian Neo-Thomist schemas. As Balthasar repeats: “if you comprehend it, it is not God.” *GL VII*, 526-543; *TD II*, 267; *TD V*, 489-521; *TL II*, 363.

⁴³⁶ McIntosh, “Christology”, 186; Williams, 38. “These are events where the human logic of an immutable, impassible God is not merely confounded (as in Luther or Kierkegaard), or reversed (as in Hegel or Moltmann), but...surpassed by an image of divine passion that transcends any capacity to explain it.” Henderson, 167.

⁴³⁷ Quash, 154; Balthasar, *Explorations*, 122.

and over every distance. If Christ is to ascend and be all-in-all, then he must also descend as “low as being casts its shadow.”⁴³⁸

3.6: The Resurrection as Affirmation

With the “boundary stone” laid in the deepest depths of damnation, a “reverse movement and operation” is effected.⁴³⁹ The divine life has now been fully exteriorized and made plain to the world in the concrete life of the *analogia entis* and now that authority, effected through the utter self-donation that brought divine into full solidarity with man, serves as the means to bring man into a sort of full solidarity with the divine. The rhythm of the kenotic donation reaches the point it eternally reached between the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Son joyfully returns all he had been given back to the Father, to the absolute extent of a “supra-surprise” that brings joy to the Father as his donation is vindicated as right and beautiful and ultimate. This reverse action is inaugurated by the Father, as he receives the Son’s obedience to the extent of death and, through the Spirit, returns Jesus Christ to life. Yet, even this is not in opposition to the death he suffered, for whole “internal logic” of God is displayed in the inseparable unity of the death and resurrection.⁴⁴⁰ This altogether seals and vindicates the divine love, proven through all being as true, beautiful, and good from the primal kenosis unto its full exteriorization, now made public in the light: resurrection is the “fulfillment of the act of creation itself,” the resultant end of what was begun in the primal kenotic event of divinity.⁴⁴¹ The Son is reinvested with the freedom of his “sovereign and active lordship,” exalted, even as he

⁴³⁸ Quoted in *MP*, 49-51.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid*, 167, 175-176, 195.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 203-204.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid*, 205, 212-213.

remains his incarnated self. After all, his identity, his mission, his life of self-donation have been proved to be the “world’s foundation” in the spontaneous, self-announcement of the resurrection.⁴⁴² The life, death, and resurrection of Christ are but “three syllables together” that spell out the free love of the Trinity that is made public in the *analogia entis*.⁴⁴³ Thus, even the Resurrection participates in that endless space of love between the Father and Son as the return of love, through the Spirit, which soon shall fill the whole world in continual exteriorization.

3.7: Ecclesiology as Divine

Since Christ is “the boundless liquefaction of the Father’s love,” he can also “liquefy the apparently solid flesh and blood of the Son...into a Eucharist to the Father that includes the whole world.”⁴⁴⁴ This, then, is the Church, the *ekklesia* which totally receives the *missio* of the Son and makes it their own in a “movement toward unity in faith and knowledge obtained in Christ the head.”⁴⁴⁵ As was sent the Son by the Father, so now the Church is sent as “existential participants in Christ’s self-abandonment,” which is carried and blown about by the Spirit, born by spiration of the reunited Father and Son.⁴⁴⁶ With Mary as their example, these are those who accept, with the same freedom as the Son, the same commission from the Father. They are those who open themselves with the same passive receptivity and the same willingness to return love as the Son, and thus take up his identity as his body,⁴⁴⁷ to follow in the paths of suffering

⁴⁴² Ibid, 207-208.

⁴⁴³ Nichols, *Say it Pentecost*, 116.

⁴⁴⁴ *TL III*, 229.

⁴⁴⁵ *GL I*, 558-559.

⁴⁴⁶ *GL V*, 150-151; *TD III*, 349-353; *MP*, 210.

⁴⁴⁷ We shall not dig far here, but this role becomes caught up in Balthasar’s gendered categories of the church as the “receptive feminine” with the priestly office of Peter, representing Christ, as the “active

and self-donation that the incarnated Son first carved out; being “in Christ.”⁴⁴⁸ Because ecclesiology, too, becomes an extension of the Trinitarian self-donation, all its actions participate in that space. For instance, prayer is what the Spirit already supports and intercedes for, as it shares in the circumcession of the Trinity and, thus, the Spirit merely gathers up the finite freedoms of its expositors being expressed and vantage them within the drama of the Father and Son.⁴⁴⁹ The church is thus receiving bride, birthing mother, and acting body as they receive the Father’s love in the passivity of the son, act out the Son’s mission in the body, and give birth to new life in passing along the Father’s life into the world.⁴⁵⁰ These divine participants constantly receive the same mission of the Son, their vine, to bear fruit that is immediately offered back up to the Father in Eucharist, sharing the love of the Father and Son, of self-donating and “letting-be” love, with each other and the world.⁴⁵¹ A “love so selfless that everyone in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth can have part in this community.”⁴⁵² This is the “new dramatic plot of interrelationships” in which the real finite freedoms of the church open ever deeper, in their own uniqueness, to the infinite freedom that drives it forward: archetype and image, all unto the “obedient and self-surrendering Son.”⁴⁵³ The divine temporally

masculine”—categories which only become confused, due to Balthasar’s original insistence that the divine plays both of these roles simultaneously. *GL V*, 256; *TD III*, 283-312; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 173.

⁴⁴⁸ *MP*, 135-137, 212. (John 15:1-4, 17:23, Rom 6:3-5, 8:1-2, 1 Cor 1:30, Col 2:12, Gal 2:20, Eph 2:8, 2 Peter 1:4).

⁴⁴⁹ But, of course, his people have become a part of the inner divine event and, thus, through the Holy Spirit, their prayers are, in a real sense, part of God’s prayer to God. Ibid, 173; *GL V*, 509-516; *TL III*, 74.

⁴⁵⁰ Marriage, as all Catholic sacraments, are forms of this image, alongside the Trinitarian ethical life of the *ekklesia*: Father as source, Son as example, and Spirit as fruit. *TD III*, 350-353; Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 166-167.

⁴⁵¹ *TD IV*, 394-398.

⁴⁵² *TL II*, 361.

⁴⁵³ Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 74-75; O’Hanlon, 62-63.

lives on in the church, never to be divided from the material becoming of their world, as creature “becomes” ever-more alike to its archetype, which now lives within.⁴⁵⁴

3.8: An End as the Beginning

The question of whether the ending has experiential meaning for God finds its answer in the realization that in “the whole of transitory time...both ends hook up to Eternity,”⁴⁵⁵ with the weighted center, temporality, found in Christ.⁴⁵⁶ The divine is found in the “supra-time”⁴⁵⁷ of eternity, of the never-ending, never-beginning kenotic action, and so, for God, there is no sense in which the end might be made separate from any other temporal occurrence, for all occurs folded up into the boundlessly infinite arms of eternity. Time’s becoming is the image of eternity’s archetypal ever-new-liveliness. After his resurrection, the *analogia entis* is the mediation this time, as he possesses a kind of “inner periodicity”⁴⁵⁸ as “the crashing down” amidst the historical horizontal line, which now bends to that middle—and eschatology rolls with it.⁴⁵⁹ The eternal states are movements from “fullness to fullness,” measured in quality and depth, not in temporal stretch.⁴⁶⁰ Heaven and hell, the states of eternal and anti-eternal, become states transferrable into the present time and moment, made alive in the free choices of those

⁴⁵⁴ It is such in the church precisely because human existence has been inserted into God’s eternal happening, “transfigured from one degree of Glory to another,” without end or satiation. *MP*, 69-71; Schindler, 104.

⁴⁵⁵ *TD V*, 100-101; Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 46.

⁴⁵⁶ *TD V*, 29.

⁴⁵⁷ Balthasar understands this as a “passive potency” in the divine to receive and return the self-donation. This is not a lack of power, but the presence of the recipient ability of love: a power of hope and faith. O’Hanlon, 67.

⁴⁵⁸ This is the dual-leveled experience of Christ’s forty post-Resurrection days: in continuity with our time, but also bringing a new fullness into it. *TD V*, 29; Kim, 263.

⁴⁵⁹ Balthasar, *Theology of History*, 86-88.

⁴⁶⁰ Properly called, this is a “movement from fullness to fullness,” which our creaturely becoming points to in the lively existence of God in eternity. Time is but the image of an “ever-new liveliness” in eternity. O’Hanlon, 91-95.

therein.⁴⁶¹ The Parousia stands as a promise of eventual utter exteriorization alike to the resurrection, the validation of that which has occurred already in this moment (the present eschaton and the crucifixion) as of cosmic significance, to be transfigured back into eternity's liveliness.⁴⁶² Indeed, when hell is created in the present, the divine pain is deep and immense, and the suffering real, though not univocally like ours. As always, it is the archetype of our pain, found in the divine exchange wherein the possibility of rejection necessarily lays, as does the pain of "bleeding to death" in utter self-gift within the "circulation of God."⁴⁶³ Consequently, the wonderous joy and enlivened 'supra-surprise' at finding Heaven created in every moment is founded, also, in archetype of the Father's response when the Son fully receives his love, and joyously returns it back to him in full and gratuitous obedience.⁴⁶⁴ Thus, because the eschaton of eternality has crashed into the present to be made manifest, Balthasar can also play more loosely with categories of universal salvation.⁴⁶⁵ God will suffer both pain and joy, but ultimately, the ending for he-who-is-life is not tragedy; he remains utterly himself, even as he experiences that which he has freely chosen to accept from created finite freedoms. Because of this, Balthasar is inclined to think that the whole cosmic "risk" of the divine self-donation must, in the very last count, be a true and total success.⁴⁶⁶ With temporal space as the image of eternity's archetypal distance between the Father and Son, and with temporal time as the image of eternity's archetypal depth of ever-greater-liveliness, everything

⁴⁶¹ *TD V*, 213.

⁴⁶² For "time is in the lap of eternity." Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth*, 202-203; O'Hanlon, 98.

⁴⁶³ This is the overcoming of pain in God. *Ibid*, 69-72.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 76.

⁴⁶⁵ Balthasar suggests universal salvation as a hopeful possibility, though he cannot say either way. What remains sure is that God's triumphant grace will not be lessened by our insistence on damnation. *Ibid*, 74-76.

⁴⁶⁶ This is Balthasar's logic for universal salvation: if God is truly influenced and ultimately non-tragic—then there must be an ultimate success. *Ibid*, 77.

from creation to eschaton is found within the free self-donation, receipt, and return of Father to Son, through Spirit, selfsame with the ultimate transcendental of being.

Balthasar can thus insist, above all, that “love alone is credible.”⁴⁶⁷

Summary: Overflowing Gratitude

Such is the course Balthasar charts between classical theology and process theology, between Heraclitus and Parmenides, and between imminence and transcendence. Balthasar avoids falling into the problems observed through history in the Classicists, such as a God with no real relationships to the world, or who we cannot really speak of, or who is so separate from Christ that the Incarnation is rendered meaningless and void of all mutual relationships. Instead, Balthasar insists that nothing is more crucial to revealing the divine nature than the Incarnation, and that which it reveals is a God *defined* by the singularly immutable Trinitarian relationship, which includes within its infinitude all the possibilities of finite relationships and mutual experience. It is in the very nature of the love-that-God-is to experience mutability and *pathos*, of a divine type.⁴⁶⁸ Every human experience and emotion, from birth to death, from joy to pain, is found in some “supra-form” within the archetypal experience of the Trinitarian God of love from which all such images derive. The relationships of the Trinity, defined by their active and passive total giving and receiving, include all finitude in their ever-greater being. By their infinite “letting-be,” and the consequent overcoming of that ever-present separation by their perichoretic union, the Trinity is perfect love. Therein, the persons

⁴⁶⁷ *TD V*, 91-93; Kim, 281. This returns to Balthasar’s essential philosophy of love: when the child wakes to the experience of a Thou and sees the absolute in their parent’s love. Love alone is credible because it is the only thing that is truly intelligible, properly basic, and properly fundamental to sheer *being*.

⁴⁶⁸ This is Balthasar’s middle-path: God is love, and thus can change, create, and experience without changing in essence or dissolving his independent necessity. *TD II*, 57, 95, 191.

eternally carve out space for the Other to mutually *be*, freely, while simultaneously overcoming that space for the sake of mutual union—classically stated, “unity-in-distinction.” Yet, that union does not destroy the separation, but is, in fact, ever magnified by it—the Trinity maintains a perfectly perichoretic unity even as the-love-that-it-is ever-traverses an infinite distance to establish it. But before Balthasar charts too close to a God who so entangled with the process of the world that he cannot really be addressed as God anymore, he pulls back from making the Trinitarian relationship necessitate the world. God cannot possess a lost transcendence, a helplessness, or a subjectivity that makes him unable to source meaning, goodness, and salvation beyond the present moment; he cannot need the world. Thus, for Balthasar, the divine remains transcendent precisely because all such experiences previously noted are chosen in sovereign freedom and born out of the archetypal self-donation of the divine from all eternity, between the Father and the Son.⁴⁶⁹ There is not a univocal likeness of creator to creature, rather, it is analogical or even cata-logical, as the divine experiences, arising from the loving kenosis of Father, Son, and Spirit, ascend “ever-greater” than all earthly experience. In giving himself up in prodigality to the Son, the Father experiences, over that great distance, a “supra-pain and supra-love,” which the Son accepts as gift, “allowing himself” to be begotten with divinity in full receptivity, and then returns back to the Father, with a “super-joy” or “super-surprise.”⁴⁷⁰ Hence, the divinity remains totally sufficient in itself, without any necessity impressed upon their great love of eternal

⁴⁶⁹ Balthasar, *Engagement with God*, 83-89.

⁴⁷⁰ “The term suffering has to be transposed doubly, first to convey quite different experience from what our term conveys, and then to transfer that reality to its quite different existence in God. But this analogous...supra-suffering is found first in the immanent Trinity in the renunciatory mode of self-giving which exists in God independently of any creative world.” O’Hanlon, 83-84, 114.

exchange.⁴⁷¹ Thus, we may mark Balthasar as successful in navigating between the two extremes: his divinity remains transcendent, while yet also able to engage truly and fully with creatures through Christ.

It is within this exchange that the divine creates the world, and it is in this distance between Father and Son that the distance of creature and creator is also traversed. The divine insists on making his divine love known and so freely gives up his glory by continuous self-donation (which is the processional relationships of the Trinity, which in turn are the persons themselves) to keep only the love that is needful and allow himself to be limited to true and mutual relationship with creatures.⁴⁷² The immeasurable creator-creature distance has already been traversed between Father and Son and, indeed, the distance between archetype and image is not all that impossible to surmount.⁴⁷³ The divine knows creatureliness as a poorly spoken dialect of a language he knows purely, in himself. All things, in some way, have been already—and always are—superlatively within the trinitarian life. Herein resides the possibility for becoming, in the eternal divine exchange. All finite freedom takes its root from here, in infinite freedom, which in choosing love, chooses to always accommodate those lesser freedoms.⁴⁷⁴ This eternal act is exteriorized in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ, the sole *analogia entis* by which the divine is to be perceived as both real participant (passive) and transcendently ontological (active).⁴⁷⁵ In the second extension of the divine kenosis, God becomes man. This is not in two contradictory states, but in the organic state that flows from the primal movement

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 116.

⁴⁷² *TD II*, 480; *TD IV*, 230-231, 267, 278, 286, 392, 440-450.

⁴⁷³ In Balthasar's mind, Protestant Liberalism falls opposite of neo-Thomism: German idealism, which merely eternalizes pain, sin and evil, new and without redemption, in the eternal life of God. *TD V*, 213-214, 222-225.

⁴⁷⁴ Henderson, 193.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, 202; O'Hanlon, 81.

of the Trinity, utterly in harmony with divinity even in poverty.⁴⁷⁶ God can give up of himself to become human precisely because that “giving up” is the only thing essential to God’s being, indeed, the sort of receptivity and obedience found in the mission of the human Son is the very identity of the Son since eternity.⁴⁷⁷ The Son is fully God in being the revelation of the Father (his donation) and the receptivity of the Son (his obedience), while also fully man in being materially dependent upon receiving fullness totally from the Father. Thus, the incarnation, the third kenosis, is the highest actualization of both: the archetype condensed to image.⁴⁷⁸ This obedience is taken to the furthest point in the crucifixion, wherein the world is “grounded more deeply in God than sin could ever estrange it from him”; the suffering experienced by divinity in death is the very definition of himself as the self-donating deity.⁴⁷⁹ In this suffering and emptying abandonment, there is essential continuity with the divine (self-donation and total obedience) and discontinuity (in become sin and imbibing death). Yet, even this discontinuity is in continuity with the divine, for it is in freely willing to become so that the revelation of love from the Father and obedience from the Son is made ever-more magnified.⁴⁸⁰ This is only continued in being truly dead, wherein the total space of separation between Father and Son is reached as the Son is utterly passive and alienated. Yet, even this is plotted out to divine service, for even this can be encapsulated in the eternal separation of Father and Son.⁴⁸¹ Thus, we may mark Balthasar as true to his Christocentrism; the entire solution

⁴⁷⁶ Rather than the human nature of Christ threatening to drag down the divine, it is the Son who enters such experiences and elevates them to the life of the Trinity’s eternal, archetypal happening. *TD III*, 353.

⁴⁷⁷ O’Hanlon, 128.

⁴⁷⁸ *MP*, 216.

⁴⁷⁹ As each divine person receives their being in this way, it can truly and astonishingly be sad that “in this reality of love, *to receive is just as Divine to give*.” O’Hanlon, 121.

⁴⁸⁰ *MP*, 262; *TD IV*, 67, 90..

⁴⁸¹ O’Hanlon, 119-120.

can only be perceived through the self-donating condescension of Christ to the furthest extent, and it is only from Him that such predilection of the divine-in-itself might be made, though in a distant way that yet respects the mystery.⁴⁸²

Finally, then, the incarnational continuity comes to a head when, in the resurrection, the exteriorization of divinity that has been going along this whole time is made utterly public and validated in its goodness, truth, and beauty, and is liquefied into the whole world, through the Spirit, as the Church takes up the same mission as the son (so, the same receptive identity) and follows in his ways, becoming thus enclosed in the same relationship of divine union as the Father with the Son.⁴⁸³ In this, the eschatological end is brought to the present, as the human and divine both truly experience the heavenly and hellish states of being, as our time is linked up with divine “supra-time” (which is the archetypal and qualitative depth of liveliness as eternity) and “supra-space” (which is the archetypal and relational distance of Father and Son)⁴⁸⁴. Together, this presents a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of how the divine life of self-donation is able to ever-surmount the infinite and finite, the creator and creature, the possible and actual, the archetype and image, and maintain experiences and suffering that are rooted in the sole immutable factor of the divine,⁴⁸⁵ from which all else immutably is encapsulated:

⁴⁸² Henderson, 141; *TD IV*, 240.

⁴⁸³ We are thus participants of the divine nature and the truly reciprocal dialogue that, in superlative fashion, is its very being in both giving and receiving: “Born of the spirit as we are, we exist in the fire of love in which Father and Son encounter each other, fused together with the Spirit, we simultaneously bear witness and give glory to this love.” *TL III*, 448.

⁴⁸⁴ Jesus Christ began “the eternal form of subjection that will now enfold all the world’s beings. It is as if the Son’s final subjection is also the last condition for the world’s eternal subjection to God—a Eucharist for all eternity,” in image of the original archetype, now opened to enfold the world in its inner self-surrendering. *TD V*, 517-518.

⁴⁸⁵ It is the transparency of Christ’s human-being that allows the divine love to shine through, in a way deeper and more content with character-essences than Neo-Thomism. Henderson, 224-225; *MP*, 136-136; *GL VII*, 84, 211.

freely chosen love, manifesting in self-donation.⁴⁸⁶ It is in this uninterrupted vitality which the divine suffers no consequent becoming, no created change, but it is also therein where the divine is always moving, always experiencing, always “super-becoming” in the kenotic relationship of Father and Son.⁴⁸⁷ Thus, we may mark Balthasar successful at remaining true to his transcendental method; the very foundation of reality is love. The divine is immutably love, and therefore, can permit mutability in other senses. The divine is love, and therefore may remain perfect in experiencing the “*supra-pathos*” of his archetypal experiences that come necessarily with mutual love, amidst the Trinity. Because Balthasar’s solution is love—gratuitous, unbounded, and overflowing self-donation of Father and Son—then, his solution is also true, good, and beautiful. True because “being appears as it is” in the exteriorization of the Trinity’s love through the *analogia entis*; revealing the eternal disclosure of divinity to itself, the “Thou” now awakening humanity’s “Thou”, in the primal kenosis of total and utter self-donation. Good, because it is the action of God-in-Christ to experience that which is most opposite himself, proving divine goodness in the very act of retrieving humanity’s love and re-incorporating it into the perfectly good response of Son-to-Father when faced with the kenotic gift, all achieved in total and complete freedom that makes the good worthwhile. And, last, Beautiful, because it is the total self-revelation of being inviting, enticing, all others to participate in that original flow that defines Father, Son, and Spirit. Only love can explain the Trinity, only love can hold together its seeming paradox without slipping

⁴⁸⁶ Balthasar looks to combine the static with the dynamic, that he might avoid the “rationalism of an essentialist ontology” without also giving priority to process. Instead, the firmly ontological must remain without denying the truth of becoming. God’s changes are founded in an unchanging and groundless love. O’Hanlon, 112-113.

⁴⁸⁷ O’Hanlon, 79-80.

into heresy, only love can maintain within it the tension of being and becoming, of mutability and immutability, of immanence and transcendence, without being lost to one of the other.⁴⁸⁸ The *analogia entis*, in its loving life, is the wooing window-glimpse into a dance eternal, transformative and transportative into the incomprehensibly divine selflessness and spontaneous joy derived from total self-donation. Thus, the divine is immanently describable, yet never capturable in his transcendence—his mystery remains “ever-more.”⁴⁸⁹

Thus, having seen how Balthasar avoids the pitfalls of both a God of “being” and “becoming” by perceiving how, in love, they are actually one, we may return to the final question that must have arisen along the way. If God as archetype requires no image, if creation is the reflection of divinity, if God is under no compulsions, if the Son’s life and death was the ongoing exteriorization and full manifestation of events already eventful in God, if all becoming can be included within the eternal experience of the “supra time and space” of eternity, then what was the point this whole existence? Why does being, shot-through with the transcendentals of beauty, truth, and goodness, summarized in love, extend beyond the divinity itself?⁴⁹⁰ We cannot say with the Process theologians that God requires the world for any reason—whether to become himself or truly love—for we have established that God is immutably love and the world is but imaged reflection of his archetype. But nor can we, with many of the Classicists, treat creation so dismally as to imagine it only for an “accidental glorification” of God, for which he has no real want or

⁴⁸⁸ As Balthasar quotes Gustav Siewerth: “Love is thus more comprehensive than being itself; it is the ‘transcendental’ *par excellence* that comprehends the reality of being, of truth, and of goodness.” *TL II*, 176-177.

⁴⁸⁹ Balthasar insists that what happens in this hour remains forever a mystery, never reducible to any system, but always to be examined from a variety of angles. *TD IV*, 240.

⁴⁹⁰ “It is here that God breaks forever all the wisdom of the world by the folly of his love, which chooses men without reason.” Balthasar, *Elucidations*, 42.

relationship and which, indeed, has absolutely no effect upon him. Balthasar has left neither of those choices open—existence must fall somewhere between needful and needless.⁴⁹¹ What reason has the eternally realized God have for such a motion, or even risk? Why be exteriorized to the most painful extent? Shall we expect the answer to be founded anywhere different than those divine depths of kenosis whence all other answers have arisen? Indeed, within those depths we learn that God is, within himself, not only an uninfluenced being, but in himself, the *most influenced being*, infinitely influenced within himself, within which all other experience of influence is contained. Balthasar answers the question of the world for himself: *“It is purely gratuitous, and we cannot get behind or above it to find some external necessity.”*

Indeed, all is to be found and founded in the self-giving love of the Father for the Son, in the Spirit:

“Then what has God gained from the world? An additional gift, given to the Son by the Father, but equally a gift made by the Son to the Father, and by the Spirit to both. It is a gift because, through the distinct operations of each of the three persons, the world acquires an inward share in the Divine exchange of Life.

*As a result the world is able to take the Divine things that it has received from God, together with the gift of being created, and return them to God as a Divine gift.”*⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ *TD V*, 507-508.

⁴⁹² *Ibid*, 521.

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